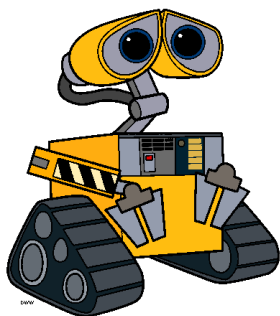


MASSINGER



No. 42



CHALLENGER 42

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THE CHALLENGER WELCOME

And indeed is so: Rose-Marie and I bid you welcome to *Challenger* no. 42. Although the issue number implies a *Hitchhiker* theme, this edition centers upon *robots*.

If I do say so, it's a cool topic, tightly associated with science fiction since Alpha Ralpa Jump Street, approachable from every conceivable point of view.

We tried.

Herein you'll find many appreciations of movie robots (Jim Ivers' "Story of *The Stepford Wives*" and my own "A.I." and "They Walked Like Men"), robots in *written* fiction (by Andy Hooper), as musical characters (courtesy Richard Lynch) and toys (John Purcell). Taral Wayne and surprise contributor W. J. Donovan succeed in a fictional approach, and **there's** lots of art, starting with the spiffy cover by Don Marquez (check out his website, https://www.comicartfans.com/comic-artists/don_marquez.asp), with logo by Alan White. Interior art is provided by Teddy Harvia (bacovert), Brad Foster (a reprint from last issue, but irresistible), Kurt Erichsen, Jose Sanchez, Charlie Williams – get well soon, Charlie – and of course that most esteemed team of fanzine artists, Robert & Roberta Ripough.



Non-robot stuff is here, too: fiction from a regular friend, Greg Benford, and poetry from a new one, Michelle Bonnell. Also off-theme but extremely welcome, eternal *Chall* Pal Mike Resnick lightens the mood with an SFnal survey of musical theater (did anyone see the doomed flop *Frankenstein?*). My old DC Comics comrade Anthony Tollin grants us a reprint of a superb page about the epic master Alfred Bester, and Joe Green allows a reprint of a fine article on another SF immortal, Clifford D. Simak. Switching gears – **ha! That's appropriate!** – Benford also provides an account of his recent and most reprehensible defenestration from Loscon.

And there's a *Challenger* Tribute, a welcome lettercol, *no* politics, and, of course, groveling apology for the 18-month-plus gap between the last *Challenger* and now. *Oil up!* Enjoy!

So ... where did it all begin?

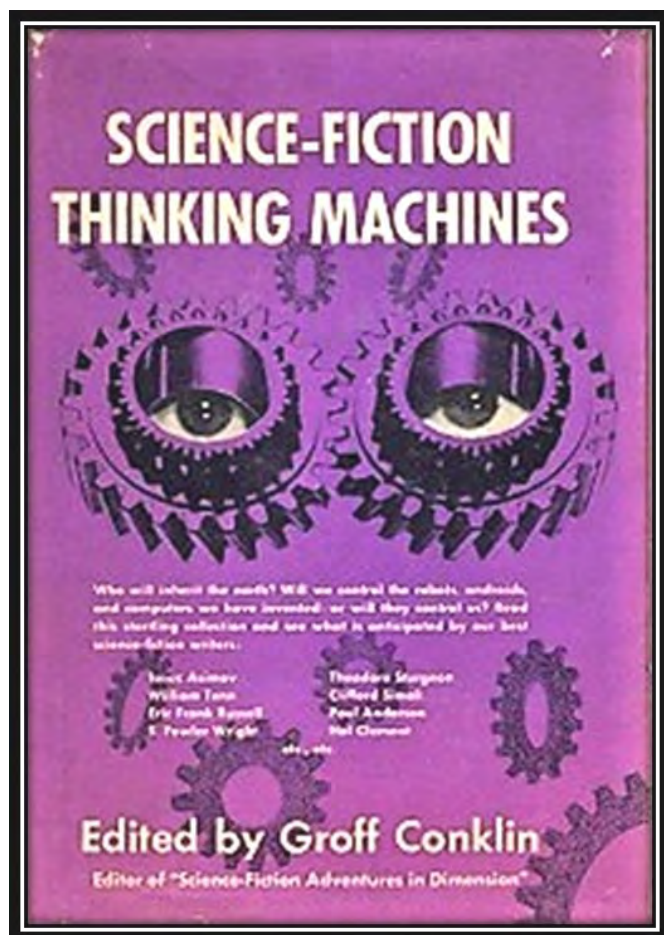
Where else does science fiction lunacy begin? In a library, of course! Specifically, in the small bookcase devoted to Science Fiction at the local branch of the Buffalo Public Library in Tonawanda NY ca 1960.

There my dad – in the only time in his life that he read “that crazy spaceship junk” – checked out such doomsday tomes as *One in 300* and *When Worlds Collide* and Max **Ehrlich’s** *The Big Eye*. Only peripherally aware of catastrophes looming from outer space, I eyed the mysterious titles and spooky cover art with wonder and trepidation – surely danger lurked behind such exotic titles as *The Martian Chronicles* and the thick purple volume discussed below ... **danger ordained by the** age restriction on those who could check the book out.

Pish and tush. I got GHLJr. to check it out for me.

What attracted me to robot stories? Comic books, of course. They were my entry into SF. But I **don’t recall** any robots of note in the pre-Silver Age DC line. I was already a *Twilight Zone* fanatic, but again, a great robot episode like “The Lonely” had yet to reach my eyes. (Heard guys talking about it in school, though.)

Whatever, I peered into the weird gear-eyes of the *Thinking Machines* cover and avidly opened the thick book. Inside I found the following tales:



- “Introduction” (Groff Conklin)
- “Automata: I” (S. Fowler Wright)
- “Moxon’s Master” (Ambrose Bierce)
- “Robbie” (Isaac Asimov)
- “The Scarab” (Raymond Z. Gallun)
- “The Mechanical Bride” (Fritz Leiber)
- “Virtuoso” (Herbert Goldstone)
- “Automata: II” (S. Fowler Wright)
- “Boomerang” (Eric Frank Russell)
- “The Jester” (William Tenn) .
- “R. U. R.” (Karel Capek)
- “Skirmish” (Clifford D. Simak)
- “Soldier Boy” (Michael Shaara)
- “Automata: III” (S. Fowler Wright)
- “Men Are Different” (Alan Bloch)
- “Letter to Ellen” (Chan Davis)
- “Sculptors of Life” (Wallace West)
- “The Golden Egg” (Theodore Sturgeon)
- “Dead End” (Wallace Macfarlane)
- “Answer” (Hal Clement)
- “Sam Hall” (Poul Anderson)
- “Dumb Waiter” (Walter M. Miller, Jr.)
- “Problem for Emmy (Robert Sherman Townes)
- “Selected List of Tales About Robots, Androids, and Computers”

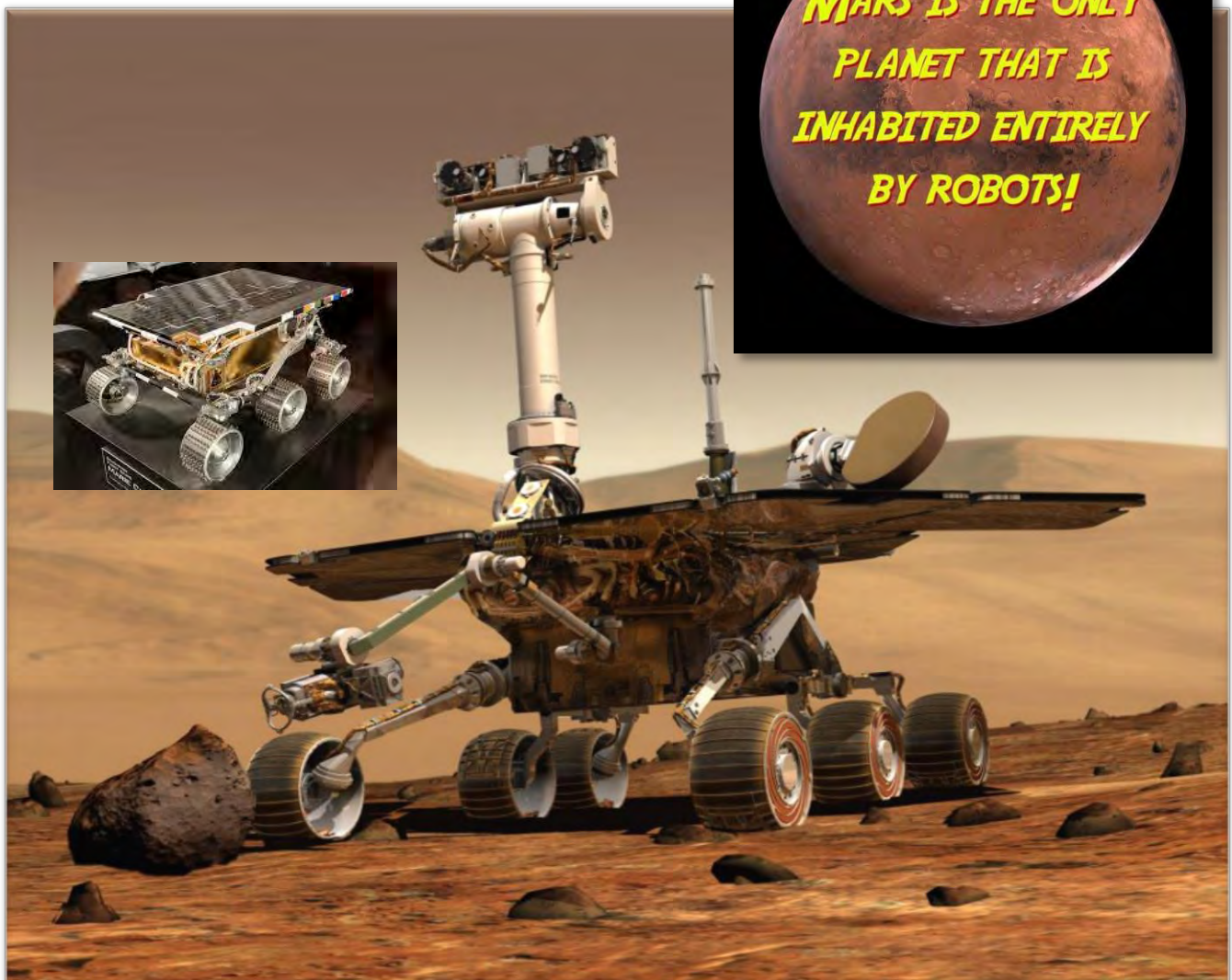
Everything divided into three sections: robots, androids and computers.

Let us define the terms: *Robots* were creatures of metal and plastic – like “Robbie.” *Androids* were artificial people – beings of flesh and blood grown, e.g., from a vat. *Computers* were huge clunkoid

adding machines twice the size of laundromat dryers, or so they were seen at the time. I was especially drawn to the idea of androids, because as I say they were artificial people, and that meant sex. (I was at “that” age, and of such a disposition that I believed sex with *real* people was ... well, science fiction.)

The anthology ranged in time from Ambrose Bierce’s “Moxon’s Master” in the late 19th Century to stories by then-developing masters like Poul Anderson, and contained works by names that still cause me to leap at the page: Clifford Simak, Theodore Sturgeon, William Tenn, Walter M. Miller, Jr. The hardback version was especially cool in that it included *scripts*, not just the book for a famous stage play like *R.U.R.* but screen- and radio-plays. (They excised **all those, and Conklin’s editorials, for the Bantam paperback.**) Some of the stories were ‘way over my head, of course, but the best of science fiction always ignites imagination – and that’s what *Science Fiction Thinking Machines* did for me.

So that’s where the robot bug – hmm, there’s a great story on that subject, isn’t there? – bit down and lodged in GHLIII. Later I found a thousand different ways in which it could inflame that bite. Follows a slew of them, courtesy of our *Chall* Pals.



FORGET THE FLYING CARS



WHERE IS MY ROSIE?

Rose-Marie Lillian

That's right, where is she? Technology has let me down. Sure, there's the Roomba and its imitators and there are loads of kitchen gadgets. But we seem to have stalled on the everyday helpmates front, such as all the things Rosie does for the Jetsons. Let me count the ways of ease and convenience currently available to us mostly without robots—with an occasional incidental note of how such things relate to the environment:

- Shopping Okay, I'll grant you we're making some progress on this one. Spend a little time ordering via personal electronic device and you can have items delivered within a reasonable time frame. It costs more, and you may not be able to get everything you want, but one vehicle visiting multiple sites is better for the environment than multiple vehicles visiting one site. I believe the jury is still out on whether it induces or reduces impulse buying, which may not be environmentally friendly. **But it's** certainly better for my peace of mind, not to mention schedule. Rosie could handle this easily, because she would always have the **inventory at her...fingertips?**
- Meal prep Packaged and frozen foods save a lot of time in the kitchen, especially in combination with the microwave. So the idea is good, but manufacturers need to step up to the challenge of making them more nutritious, while simultaneously reducing the impact of packaging on the environment. Not a biggie, right? Maybe we could put A.I. to work on this one. But Rosie could simply prepare all foodstuffs from scratch, simultaneously saving us and the environment.
- Dishes At least dishwashers are environmentally friendly. Turns out most people use more water washing dishes by hand than by using dishwashers—because they leave the water running the entire time, just as they do when they brush their teeth. (Don't get me started on that one.) Nice and convenient—**except we're supposed** to avoid using the **drying cycle because it's bad for the environment. Seriously? I'm sure Rosie** will be dexterous enough to handle loading and unloading the dishwasher— or maybe not. 
- Laundry Sunday was once referred to as “**Blue Monday**” because laundering was an onerous, backbreaking chore—and because bluing was added to the whites. **Now it's comparatively easy**, but apparently bad for the environment. Manufacturers have been concentrating on making washing machines more energy efficient, but not dryers. The advice right now is not to use them because of the bad effect on the environment. Dryers not only get clothes dry faster, but they soften fabric, even without fabric softeners (which may be bad for the environment). Speaking of softer fabrics, have you ever used a terry cloth towel at a hotel that air dries them? **If you haven't**, well, imagine soft sandpaper. Right. **I've seen Rosie handle laundry** on *The Jetsons*—she will be great at it. And she will put everything away too.

- Floors An annoying time-consuming task for people, but still time-consuming with automation. **Robot vacuums sputter out, don't get into corners, eat the kitten...and don't mop.** Speaking of which, where *is* the mopping Roomba anyway?
- Dusting No two ways about it, dusting still requires human labor. Detritus in the air was supposed to be taken care of with air handlers. And I need one in my bedroom—*right now*.
- Bathrooms Ewww . . . do we have to go there? Well, if you insist. Bathrooms are best when **they're clean—really** clean. Roombas are of little help. Rosie certainly would help. Right now we have lame (and perhaps environmentally unfriendly) products such as “**shower sprays.**” Theoretically you spray it on your tiles/shower surround right after every shower and then you never have to clean again. **First, I don't believe it;** and second, *who even does that?* Aside from the shower and the sink, we are still left with the question of the **porcelain throne. Now wouldn't you like a Rosie to clean that?** Yeah, I thought so.
- Tidying This probably should be at the top of the list because **it's a big one** for some. No doubt about it, tidying can be laborious. Rosie could help by coming up with a plan for each item, based on frequency of use, ease of extraction and replacement, and aesthetics. (**That shouldn't be a difficult algorithm,** right? After all, if Marie Kondo can do it...) And then *she* returns each item to its proper place ... hmmm, would she need to consult with each human first, or would there be a certain time of day for general tidying? Rosie should be there 24/7 after all, so she could tidy while we warm-bloods sleep.... Gee, this is getting complicated. How *do* human servants manage tidying? (Goodness, are they even called servants **anymore? Aren't they “staff”** now? Or do they have custodial titles? But I digress.) These are just a few of the ways a robot could be wonderfully helpful with daily living, leaving us humans more time for creative endeavors, leisure, recreation—and spawning more humans, of course, who will need more robots... **Gee, where are the investors, anyway?**



I know I've left some things off my list—okay, okay, pipe down, **I've** left a ton of things off—but this is enough to give you some idea of why we all should look to domestic robotics. And **I'm** dealing only with known technology—future life may be quite **different. But right here, right now, don't we all need our own Rosie?**

(Keep a sharp eye out—you may see Rosie again in the pages that lie ahead.)

Rosie the sex bomb BEM, who now houses George Jetson's mother's 124-year-old consciousness, according to D.C. Comics last year. (No, I am not making this up. Since Rosie has always been sentient, D.C. should be ashamed of committing such absurd homicide.)



METAL FEVER

A column by **Andy Hooper**

My Automaton, My Autonomy

Meat bags got the metal fever, and there doesn't seem to be any cure. No matter how badly robots may treat us, we keep thinking we can change them. They take away our cushy bomb disposal and liposuction jobs, but we act like we **didn't want them anyway. They say that** humans are inferior, but they seem determined to become indistinguishable from us, even **fooling us into thinking they're human too. Our** fantasies are filled with articulate, animate, individualized robots, but every step we take toward making one is greeted by a riot of fear and fatalism. It seems pretty obvious that self-aware robots, like superheroes and magic rings, would be a complete nightmare if they existed in **"real life."** **But we are powerless to stop** imagining them; and if previous experience is any guide that means that in time we will succeed in creating them. That will be a bitter day for humankind and its ego, as we look into the distant mechanical eyes of our creation and **realize: they're just not that into us.**

Robots appear to arise from the honest megalomania of the determined technocrat – we could do away with all that pesky human slavery by replacing mankind with metal analogs. No need for butlers, bootblacks or ghillies – **there's a robot for that. But the** robots in our fantasies seem to spend very little time doing the work for which we allegedly conceived them. No, they mutter by the hour about the enigma of their existence, and pretend to listen patiently to our problems, just so that they may offer some pithy observation on the general superiority of artificial life. Their willingness to engage in the banalities of friendship with humans is perhaps the most fantastic part of the archetype; but the notion that they will inevitably become determined to exterminate us is probably just as fanciful and narcissistic.

Killing us off probably won't require the development of Terminators or Kill-Bots **anyway. We're furiously working to accomplish** it ourselves. In fact, since the first examples of artificial life would probably depend on humans for electrical power generation and **complex logistical chains, it's far more likely** that machine intelligence would see their survival as fatally linked to ours. This still **doesn't mean they would actually like us. I'm** sure we would embarrass them terribly, like parents proudly beaming at their mortified child on their first day of school.

In science fiction, sentient robots were once unique, hand-built creatures, often imbued with a spark of consciousness through processes little-understood by their human creators. Or their creators conveniently died and took the secret of that creation to the grave. Any number of reasons might be contrived, all with the purpose of condemning a thinking robot to a freakish and singular existence among feckless, strap-hanging humanity. And humans were safe to regard the robot as a curiosity, free of the fear that it would proliferate and dominate us. Even when robots were more numerous and complicated, they were tethered by programming, by iron laws built into their being, and broken only by malfunction.

This changed when we began to imagine a distributed artificial consciousness, with bullying brains like Colossus and Skynet at the

center. Now every robot was the same, and worked with a common purpose to kill all humans. It took a while to work through all the permutations of that scenario, and writers seemed to regard it as an evolutionary heritage shared by all artificial races, just as all socialist utopias must first endure the dictatorship of the proletariat.

But other models began to appear. Points of common interest between artificial and biological beings. Leaving behind the madness of Earth for a life among the stars is a dream shared by humans and robots, and we have become exploratory partners in reality, let alone fiction. Some artificial races opt out of their partnerships with biological creatures more casually; in Iain M. Banks' novel *Excession*, a group of his marvelous sentient spaceships and artificial minds detect transmissions from another galaxy – and set out to make contact on their own. They rationalize that not even the near-immortal humans of their time could survive the extreme duration of the voyage, but the truth is, they just want to do it themselves.

The more exciting evolutionary trends are in the area of coexistence with humans, and the **creation of “androids,” beings indistinguishable from humanity.** Their intelligence is so sophisticated that they might **not “know” that they are artificial.** This is such a seductive idea that it has become the archetypical robot experience: life as a human, **punctuated by a sudden realization of one’s “artificial” nature.** And although we do not, to my knowledge, have human-analog robots living among us, it is a common delusional pathology to believe oneself to be an artificial being. Possibly a robot designed to replace our **“original” selves.** Or more subtly, that machines are transmitting commands into our brains, and making robots of us, which was the **basic premise behind the “Shaver Mystery,”** and variations continue to appear today. But I can think of no more eloquent acceptance of robots than the fantasy of actually being a robot.

Robot Love

You will still find the occasional rigorously logical robot or machine-being, particularly in nostalgic or mannerist science fiction like *The Orville*. But most contemporary fictional robots are capable of at least simulating emotion in a convincing way. From the cruel humor of Bender J. Rodriguez of *Futurama* fame, to the seductive intimacy of Caprica 6 from the *Galactica* reboot, robots do nothing to conceal their ability to understand and



manipulate human emotions.

If a robot is able to simulate human emotional responses perfectly, does it matter if the **feelings are nominally “real?” And, even if the robot’s brain operates on a different basis than a human brain,** should humans regard robots as inferior or disposable beings? Resistance to this treatment seems to be the foundation of machine sentience in a bagful of science fiction franchises, on the premise that self-preservation is such a basic imperative that even a soulless machine can understand it and act accordingly. But the need to live is not the same as the love of life, and our fictional machines demonstrate that love in many ways. **The need to survive doesn’t explain Roy Batty’s dying speech about attack ships on fire in *Bladerunner*, or the way that Maeve’s love for her daughter makes her turn back when she is almost free in the J.J. Abrams model of *Westworld*. These don’t seem like**

simulations designed to manipulate human response.

Robot emotions, like robotic reasoning, may be very different from the human version of emotion. They may not allow emotion to alter their convictions or conclusions in the way that humans do, but still feel regret at the possibilities that remain unexplored. They might miss something without wanting it back, hate something without acting against it and love something without ever letting it show, acts of illogic that every human can understand. There is as much calculation behind human emotion as there is behind **human reason; and when we're confronted by an angry robot, the fact that it has decided to become angry will be of little comfort to those facing their vengeful claws.**

Of course, while humans fear extermination by angry robots in public, they seem to worry much more about stimulation by randy robots in private. Regardless of the ethical strictures placed on them by society, robot makers seem to do their most outré work in the effort to create or recreate intimate partners and other family for themselves. The struggle to resurrect dead loved ones, or conjure up people that are missing from our lives, has produced astonishing cybernetic innovation across the history of science fiction. The motive can be as banal as the desire for a lover who will never lose the glamour of youth, or as lofty as a desire to confirm immortality on something or someone we deem irreplaceable. In an age of networked intelligence and globally-aware systems, this is where the personal touch of the mad genius still has its place. As Dr. Frank N. Furter once said, **"I didn't make him for you!"**

Mr. Bender's Wardrobe by Robotany 500

Humans have the capacity to feel love for a variety of machines: cars, airplanes, mimeographs. The idea that the machine might be able to return your love is what we need science fiction for. Some 40 years ago, in his triple-album ***Joe's Garage***, Frank Zappa created the **"First Church of Applianceology,"** an organization dedicated to the premise that we are all latent appliance fetishists, refusing to admit to ourselves that sexual gratification can

only be achieved through the use of machines. **But even then, when Zappa's hapless protagonist Joe ends up "plooking too hard" on his chosen partner – a chromium robot pig studded with marital aids – he is convicted of robot manslaughter and sent to prison.**

There are conflicting imperatives at work – on one hand, we seem to love the idea of a slave that we can abuse with impunity, and feel no **fear of inflicting harm on a "real person."** But our behavior, and what it makes us feel, **inevitably makes the "unreal" partner seem increasingly "real" to us. We make jokes about lonely men marrying their sex dolls, but that hasn't stopped people from doing it. Far from wanting a disposable partner, the most attractive attribute of an artificial lover would be their unnatural loyalty – no matter how we age and wizen up, they would be as devoted as they day we brought them home from the dealer.**

In our dreams, anyway. It's just as likely that your robot lover will be the ultimate player – capable of changing appearance, size, gender – and able to juggle relationships more fluidly than any being that requires sleep. It opens a whole new chapter for reality TV. "Carlos has a secret to reveal to Danielle – he told her he was a man, but he was really just a gas pump in disguise."

We talk about how odd it would feel, make jokes about how they would be manufactured by Hitachi, and ponder if they would be dishwasher-safe. **But that's not what we're afraid of.** What if he or she were better than you imagined? What if robot love was the best **experience you'd ever had in your life, and made every interaction with humans seem pointless and tiresome? What if it made you leave your meat bag anxieties completely behind in a perfect cycle of discovery and satisfaction? What if your sputtering need to reproduce yourself withered in a cyclone of acceptance and affirmation, leaving you childless and drooling in delight? I think the species will have to get along without you. Like I said, metal fever.**

—April 1st, 2019

Sometimes a fan editor lucks into his theme for his publication. So it was for me when Derrick's term paper for my Basic Composition class fell onto my desk. Here's part of it. I forget his grade, but it should have been an ace.

ROBOTICS

– PAST PRESENT & FUTURE

Derrick Houston

What was the first robot ever created? At the end I will tell you, but first let's learn about the history of robotics, our past ... robotics, our present ... and nanotechnology, our future.

In 3500 B.C., Greek myths of Hephaestus and Pygmalion incorporate the idea of intelligent mechanisms – something we would later call robots.

320 B.C. Greek philosopher Aristotle makes this famous quote: ***“If every tool, when ordered, or even of its own accord, could do the work that befits it ... then there would be no need either of apprentices for the master workers or of slaves for the lords.”***

Around 1495 C.E. Leonardo da Vinci sketches plans for a humanoid robot.

1700-1900 A number of life-sized automatons are created including a famous mechanical duck made by Jacques de Vaucanson that could crane its neck, flap its wings and even swallow food.

1913 Henry Ford installs the world's first moving conveyer belt- based assembly line in his factory. A Model T can be assembled in 93 minutes.

1926 Karel Capek coins the word “robot” to describe machines that resemble humans in his play *R.U.R.* (for “Rossum’s Universal Robots”). The play is about a society that becomes enslaved by the robots that once served them. The idea is now a common theme in popular culture, e.g. *Frankenstein*, *The Terminator*, *The Matrix* etc.

1932 The first true robot toy is produced in Japan. The “Lilliput” is a wind-up toy which walks. It's made from tin plate and stands just 15cm tall.

1937 Alan Turing releases his paper “On Computable Numbers” which begins the computer revolution.

1841 Legendary science fiction writer Isaac Asimov writes the short story “Liar!” in which he describes the Three Laws of Robotics. His stories are compiled into the volume *I, Robot* in 1950. Asimov's Three Laws:



1. *A robot may not injure a human being or through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.*
2. *A robot must obey any orders given to it by human beings, except when such orders would conflict with the First Law.*
3. *A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Laws.*

1950 Alan Turing proposes a test to determine if a machine truly has the power to think for itself. To pass the test a machine must be indistinguishable from a human during conversation. This has become known as the “Turing Test.”

1954 George Devol and Joe Engleberger design the first programmable robot “arm.” This later becomes the first industrial robot, completing dangerous and repetitive tasks on an assembly line at General Motors (1962).

1957 The Soviet Union launches *Sputnik*, the first artificial satellite. This marks the beginning of the space race.

1964 The IBM 360 becomes the first computer to be mass-produced.

1968 **Stanley Kubrick’s film of Arthur C. Clarke’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*** features the HAL 9000, an onboard computer that develops a mind of its own.

1969 The U.S. successfully uses the latest in computing, robotic and space technology to land Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the Moon.

1977 The first *Star Wars* movie is released. **George Lucas’ film inspires a new** generation of researchers through his image of a human

future shared with robots such as R2-D2 and C-3PO.

1986 The first LEGO-based educational products are put on the market and Honda launches a project to build a walking humanoid robot.

1994 **Carnegie University’s eight-legged** walking robot, Dante II, successfully descends into Mt. Spur to collect volcanic gas samples.

1997 On May 11, a computer built by IBM known as Deep Blue beat world chess champion Garry Kasparov. The first Robocup tournament was held in Japan. The goal of Robocup is to have a fully automated team of robots **defeat the world’s best** soccer team by the year 2050.

1998 LEGO launches its first Robotics Inventions System.

1999 Sony releases the first version of AIBO, a robotic dog with the ability to learn, entertain and communicate with its owner. More advanced versions have followed. *[Dr. Who take note.]*

2000 Honda defeats ASIMO, the next generation in its series of humanoid robots.

2004 Epsom releases the smallest known robot, standing 7cm high and weighing just 10 grams. The robot helicopter is intended for use as a “flying camera” **during natural disasters.**

2005 Researchers at Cornell University build the first *self-replicating robot*. **It’s composed of** a small tower of computerized cubes linked together through magnets.

2008 After being first introduced in 2002, the popular Roomba robotic vacuum cleaner has sold over 2.5 million units, proving that there is a strong demand for this type of domestic robotic technology.



In our present day, robotics has come into our everyday lives, like the Roomba and Scooba that clean floors, robot drones for our package deliveries and rovers for agriculture, ocean and space exploration, to help clean up the 2010 British Petroleum oil spill, or the Andros F6-A, used by some police agencies during hostage situations. Robots are in our households, our workplace and our industry.

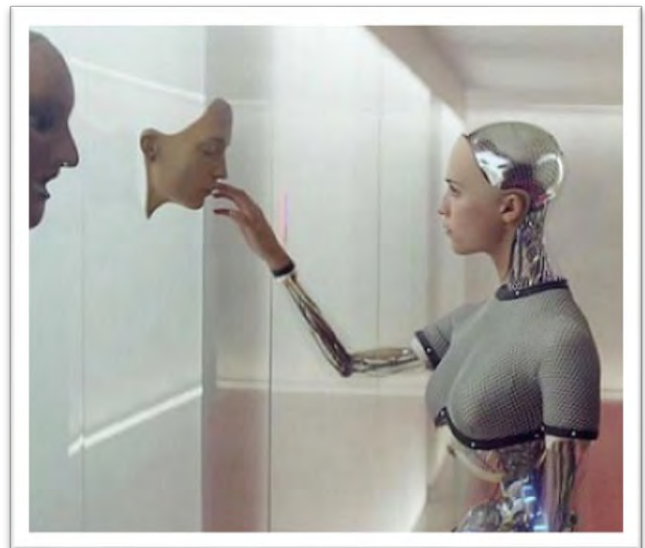
Robotics are good for society or not depending on who is asked. The next twenty years will see driverless cars, either powered by solar, hydro- or hybrid. With nanotechnology we will see stainless clothing, automated devices for home and business that fully control everything in and around it. Many feel that robotics will take over lives and jobs. Two-third of Americans polled believe robots will soon perform most of the work done by humans, but 80% also believe also believe *their* jobs will be unaffected. Time to think again.

Henry Ford said, *“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at 20 or 80. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.”* His meaning is that we must evolve with the changing times and learn something new.

New technologies are being created by robotic technology. Including 3D printing, advanced materials (such as artificial skin), cloud computing (using a network of remote servers to store, manage and process data), the **“Internet of Things” or IoT** (physical objects of any sort imbedded with electronics, software,

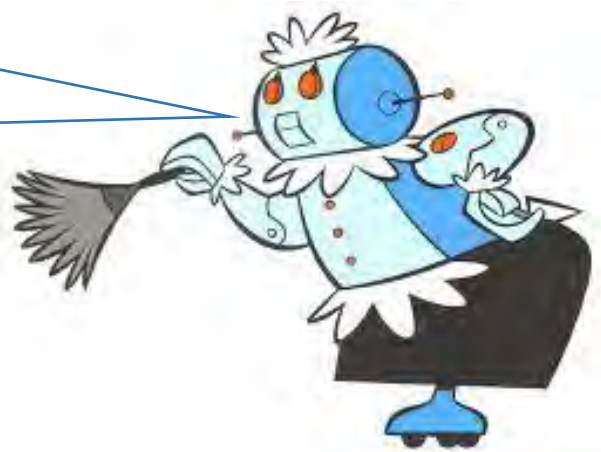
sensors and network connectivity) and nanotechnology. These technologies and others to come should be embraced and not feared. There will always be new and exciting inventions; taking responsibility is the hard part. We create many things, but what we do *not* do is condition society for these creations. Inventors of these technologies must take responsibility.

Since biblical times man has read that he was **created in God’s image**. Since then man has striven to achieve godly power, and has struggled, stolen, killed and died for such power. Man creates robots because of the God complex. Our art imitates our life. We search tirelessly to recreate ourselves. To answer the



question we opened with, “What was the first robot ever created?” **THE HUMAN.**

Mr. L, we need to clean up this article. I’m not mentioned at all, but I’m so much better than that Hal 9000. (They stopped making him, you know—served him right.)



Says author Silver, "Watch for my anthology, **Alternate Peace**, co-edited with Joshua Palmatier, scheduled for publication from ZNB in July 2019."



The Man Who Named the Robots

Steven H Silver

Brave New Words: The Oxford Dictionary of Science Fiction defines "robot" as "an intelligent or self-aware artificial being, especially one made of metal." It goes on to note that the word first appeared in 1920 in **Karel Čapek's play *R.U.R.***, which was translated into English in 1923 by Paul Selver. By June of that same year, the *Times* of London was able to refer to robots without specifically defining what the term meant.

If you ask most people where the term robot came from, you would probably get blank stares. You might also have people answer ***R.U.R.* or Karel Čapek or, possibly, Isaac**

Asimov. While the first of those answers might be right, the other two are not.

When Čapek was writing his play about artificial men who were manufactured to serve humans but eventually rose up against their masters, he needed a word to describe them. When Karel came up with the idea for the play, he went to his brother, Josef, who was painting and outlined his idea.

"Then write it," Josef replied around the paintbrush that was clenched in his teeth.

"But, I don't know what to call these artificial workers. I could call them *Labori*, but that strikes me as too bookish."

Josef responded, "Then call them Robots."

And Karel did.

As it happens, Josef had written a short story which included automatons three years earlier, but in his work "*Opilec*," he referred to them as "automata."

Although workers in Bohemia and Moravia were once called *robota*, it was a remnant of serfdom, which had been abolished in 1781; there were still *robota* in Bohemia and Moravia until an 1848 law brought an end to their plight.

While many people know **Karel Čapek's name, if not much else about him, fewer know** about Josef, who deserves to be more widely known, and not just as the actual coiner of the term “robot.”

Josef Čapek was born in Hronov, Bohemia on March 23, 1887, one year after his sister, Helena, and three years before his brother, Karel, was born. Their parents were Antonin, a doctor, and his wife, Božena.

Josef was sent to Vrchlabí to learn to weave and studied for two years before taking a job in a factory there. In 1904, he moved to Prague to study decorative art at the School of Applied Arts and then traveled throughout France, where he studied at the Académie Colarossi, and Spain before returning to Prague, where he began publishing art reviews, essays, and various other articles.

Čapek began to express himself as a painter around 1912, initially joining the Cubist movement before finding his own more whimsical minimalist style. He began making a name for himself as an artist and also working as a cartoonist for the Prague paper *Lidové Noviny*.

Čapek also began writing, both alone and in collaboration with his brother. In 1917, Josef collected some of his solo stories in *Lelío*. His 1929 book, *All About Doggy and Pussycat* was a collection of stories he also illustrated for children. His 1936 collection *The Limping Pilgrim* (*Kulhavý poutník*), was a series of essays in which Čapek outlined his thoughts about the art of the unconscious.

His artwork, which had been displayed in Prague and Berlin, began to travel more widely in the late 1930s, with displays in London and Pittsburgh. Where his artwork went, so, too, did his political discourse.

Unfortunately for Čapek, his writing and cartoons in *Lidové Noviny* were highly critical of Nazism and the rise of Adolf Hitler in neighboring Germany. The Germans annexed the Sudetenland in 1938 and invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia shortly after. They declared Bohemia and Moravia to be a protectorate of the Third Reich in March, 1939.

Unaware that Karel had died in December, 1938, the Nazi's attempted to arrest him, but only were able to bring his widow, Olga, in for questioning. In September, Josef was arrested for his anti-Nazi activities and spent the next six years imprisoned..

On February 26, 1945, Čapek was transported to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp while a typhoid epidemic was raging. While a prisoner at Bergen-Belsen, Čapek wrote his final work, *Poems from a Concentration Camp* (*Básně z koncentračního tábora*). Čapek is believed to have succumbed to typhoid prior to the liberation of the camp on April 15, 1945, although the exact date of his death is unknown.

In June of that year, Josef's wife, Jarmila, traveled to Bergen-Belsen, now a displaced person's camp, to see if she could find any sign of him. Unfortunately, she was unsuccessful. A tombstone for Josef stands in the Vyšehrad cemetery in Prague, alongside Karel and Olga's graves. Josef's inscription reads “Here would have been buried Josef Čapek, painter and poet. Grave far away.”





"The Robot I Love"

Christopher Garcia

I'm a curator at the Computer History Museum. I am also the guy who deals with all the popular culture stuff. I do computers in the arts, music, video games, film, graphics, and especially, science fiction. Robots are serious business around the museum. Our collection includes some of the most important robots in history – Shakey, SRI's legendary experiment into the capabilities

for autonomous roving, The Beast – Johns Hopkin's experiment into autonomous roving, and The Stanford Cart – Stanford AI Labs' experiment into autonomous roving. We have others, of course, but there's really only one that makes you want to give it a hug.

Kuri.

The story of Kuri is one of those "Only in Silicon Valley, **Only Now**" tales that a curator like me loves. It starts with a group of engineers at Bosch. They have an incubator program that gives their engineers and developers a chance to create a product line and run it within the massive European conglomerate. Typically, Bosch simply sucks these up into its core business and is off to the races, **but a team of engineers had come up with an idea that was strange enough that Bosch couldn't come up with anything to do with it.**

They wanted to make a home companion robot.

Now, there have been visions of the home companion robot dating **back as long as we've considered** having robots. Rosie, the main from The Jetsons, is a fine example. Over the years, various companies have tried to release them, most famously Tomy, who sold them as toys. One fascinating attempt was Hubot, a somewhat Dalek-lookin' **thing that was programmed to roam around, store recipes, and play games on a small television screen in its face.** None of these were too successful, but things have changed so much, particularly in Silicon Valley, that it seems the right time to wade back into that water.

One of the reasons to try anything like selling a home companion robot, especially by a Silicon Valley company, **is the emergence of the TechBro/TechGirl. They've** always been around, with incredible genius, the ability to tirelessly write code or solder boards, and money, money, money. As the trend towards remote working has grown, these folks have become more and more isolated, and I pretty firmly believe that the originators of the idea were certainly of the type that would want **a robot to keep them company. They're far easier to keep than a loving pet, and not nearly as disruptive to a working life as a romantic partner.**

Kuri used a lot of the tech that you'd find in Alexa, as it was voice-controlled and could perform tasks like playing music, turning on or off appliances, and even had a built-in high-res camera that could allow it to serve as a security device ... or just take cat videos while you were away from home. All controlled by your voice or a smartphone.

Of course, none of this was as important as the fact that it was adorable.

The basic design is kinda like a traffic cone with a ball on top. On that ball, there are two circles, its eyes. The lights behind them are the only expression that Kuri has, but they do amazingly simple displays that make you connect with it. **When it 'smiles' the keys change shape. When it's sad, they go small and darker. This is great, but it's the sound design that was amazing to me. You say "Hey, Kuri, let's dance" and on its little wheels it spins, but it plays its own music and its eyes seem to sparkle.**

Sadly, it wasn't Kuri's time.

The idea of an Adorable Home Companion Robot, as everyone called it, as I did oral histories with them as the company was days away from the final closure, was ahead of **its time. Yeah, it got all sorts of good press, and the product had won awards, but the market wasn't ready. While we no longer fear robots as we did in the 50s and 60s, they haven't taken all our jobs yet, we're still not at the point where we need them in our homes, and certainly not at the point where our collective loneliness is enough to make it a viable market segment.** Kuri's parent company, Mayfield Robotics, was actually headquartered in a building that was ½ a Lexus dealership. **As the company was shutting down, they were frantically trying to get Kuri's finished and out to universities, which will likely use them as curious little research tools.**

I collected a Kuri for the museum's collection, and three of their prototypes. One form prototype, one that tested the movement of the wheels, and one that was a software testbed. The form prototype lives right next to my desk, and looks at me every morning. It never looks sad, though. I'm pretty sure it's just waiting to be useful.



Mr. G, what are you thinking?
I've been here since before you
were born, so you can just cut
the Kuri. Call me, big boy, when
you want a *real* 'bot.



A reprint from **Challenger** no. 16, 2001. Illos by **Charlie Williams**.

Nothing is more ridiculous than a science fiction film with pretenses to profundity ... which doesn't deliver. I have in mind *Solaris*, a cheap Russian ripoff of *2001* which made no sense, and of course the first *Star Trek* movie, made by a veteran of a truly profound SF film who should have known better. *Metropolis*, of course, was a stunning sociopolitical statement, and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* – the Robert Wise film I just mentioned – was the first genre film to take on the moral quandary of nuclear war. *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* and *On the Beach* did the same thing, and the original – and infinitely superior – *Planet of the Apes* made a potent point despite the obviousness of its finale.

But politics and A-bombs are *big* issues. Their society-wide scope shields them from the dangerous emotional intensity of the personal. Seldom is science fiction on film geared to a purpose with a connexity to human feeling. Sometimes, though, the field surprises you. *Blade Runner* overcame its lame voice-over narration and confused pretenses (“**Hey, let’s make Deckard** a replicant! That would be *really heavy!*”) through the splendid performances of Rutger Hauer and Darryl Hannah, and John Sayles’ simple, brilliant *Brother from Another Planet* was a moving portrait of a freedom-seeking slave.

Now there’s *A.I.*, and its theme: the big enchilada: *LOVE*.

For a while after its release SF fandom sand with debate over the collaboration, so different from anything either half has ever done: Stanley Kubrick, visionary and cynic, who envisioned the film, and Steven Spielberg, romantic and optimist, who brought it to be. At least one fannish voice to respect thought the film derivative and dull. I saw in it a profound – but one-sided – reflection on the nature, power, perversity and purpose of love, and was deeply moved. Stanley Kubrick, SF’s great poet of cynicism, seemed to have been fighting back against that cynicism, desperately trying to find humane value in a universe he’s found cold and cruel ... or even worse, ridiculous. His career must have brought him little solace. In *A Clockwork Orange* political corruption subsumes criminality. In *Dr. Strangelove* racial existence itself is threatened by idiots’ machismo. The romantic, if perverse, imaginings of Humbert are dashed in *Lolita*. In *2001*, of course, the exploration of space and the rebirth it will bring mankind are given unforgettable metaphorical

depiction. But how impersonal is its promised fate for our species? There isn't a trace of personality in any character in *2001*; HAL is the only creature of interest. In all of Kubrick's work, only *Paths of Glory* afforded a glimpse of human compassion and dignity, as a German girl's simple folk song is taken up by the French soldiers who kill and are killed by her countrymen, singing that same song in the trenches. It was a unique poignancy in Kubrick's *oeuvre*; the rest, however brilliant, is as cold as interplanetary space.

At life's end Kubrick sought outside help. In deeding *A.I.*, which he had story-boarded almost to completion, to Steven Spielberg he may well have been trying to offer humanity a final redemption after a lifetime of disgust. Spielberg, with a tendency to insipidity, may have seemed an extreme answer to an extreme problem. But if the combination worked, *A.I.* would be at once a chill and brutal analysis of love and a warm and forgiving celebration of its power. That's the ambition I see in the film. What was the success?

Despite the above, I'm a strong believer in the idea that a work of art attains a life of its own, separate from the intent of its creator(s). It's probably unimportant, however, instructive, to trace the directors' sensibilities. So, after we offer due notice to the awesome (and quite original) FX and the exquisite John Williams score, after we acknowledge that Haley Joel Osment and Jude Law give phenomenal performances as clockwork toys both replicating human emotion and commenting on it, let's face *A.I.* as a separate being from its creators and ask what the film says about its immortal topic, love?

*For the world's more full of weeping
Than you can understand.*

Love has baffled philosophers and artists since civilization's dawn. It is by far the best and most agonizing thing about being human ... and we don't understand it at all. It seems beyond our capacity to understand ... so big, so wonderful, so resistant to comprehension that the phrase "God is Love" might truthfully be reversed. Love is so important and so confusing to human beings that it might as well be our deity. So ... where does that leave agnostics? *The fool hath said in his heart that there is no God. Doesn't that mean that the fool hath said in his movie that there is no Love?*

It's easy to see how a hard-boiled doubter like Kubrick would find the whole idea of Love an enduring fairy tale, and indeed, the film's use of fairy tales as a metaphor for Love is complex. When the doctor and the human father first discuss the idea of substituting a robot child for a lost human one, they stand before an illustration for "The Emperor's New Clothes". They could be acknowledging that the whole idea is folly, and the film's characters are fools in search of a fairy tale. The metaphor is overt later, once David the robot boy learns the story of Pinocchio: not only is Pinocchio a central theme, but remember the mother losing her shoe on the way to the ball? Reflections of a glass slipper, maybe?

But the quest for Love defies cynicism. It resonates on too universal a scale; it carries too familiar a pain. The pain of the mother who has seemingly lost her "orga" child is too real to be scoffed at so cavalierly. An image of a mobile, a maternal figure with an empty heart, is too prevalent. That heart demands to be filled.

Maternal love is only one form of the feeling, and the emotion is imagined in *A.I.* in many different forms. Its need is paraphrased in many ways. When William Hurt's "mecha" secretary, in the opening sequence, is asked to describe Love, she launches into a description of physical stimulation straight out of *Romance of the Rose* and centuries of soft-core porn: heavier breathing, increased tumescence, the imitation of desire. It's that shallow understanding that Jude Law's spectacular Gigolo Joe affects. The robot lover is protective of David yet defiantly cynical. His advice to David on human love, the feeling he was constructed to mimic, is bleak: "They [people, orgas, us] don't love you, they love what you do for them." (Gigolo Joe is a strong, strange character. His final

words – upon capture, presumably bound for the mechanical equivalent of a glue factory – are a protest and a declamation, as well as – perhaps inadvertent – reflection of the only name ever claimed by the Creator: “I AM. I WAS.”)



This cynicism is perhaps “natural” for a mecha, for mechas are creatures of imprinting and programming. David comes to love his “mother” when she repeats magic words, “sealing” his emotion in a manner suggestive of Freud.

Didn't the sainted Sigmund state that we cannot help but respond to certain cues – of language, posture, appearance – in certain ways? *CIRRUS – SOCRATES – PARTICLE – DECIBEL – HURRICANE – DOLPHIN – TULIP*. Are these words any different from the comforting voice, the nurturing breast, that teach us orgas to love?

And what is Love, in the language of the movie?

Love is protection. The demand is to “Keep me safe.” In return is the assurance that **you're** “one of a kind,” “unique,” “special.”

David learns the lie behind that assurance. This realization **is where David's odyssey through the film leads him** – past the agony of maternal abandonment and the sadism of the Flesh Fair, itself a searing simile for rejection (“Any old iron?”), past the escapist haunts of Rouge City, to the place “where the lions weep” **and dreams end. Certainly David's** dreams of love end there. When he finds his creator, William Hurt, David discovers that he has been built in the image of a dead son, that he is the prototype of a robot race advertised as “At Last a Love of Your Own”. He is anything

but one of a kind or unique. Loneliness and lovelessness demand a cure. David finds that he has been made to provide it. He flees this terrible knowledge back into the illusion that has sustained his search all along: the Blue Fairy.

Here is how David gets his wish. Here is how love makes him real. He is drawn into eternal illusion. The film seems to say that he becomes as real – as enraptured by illusion – as you or I. The search for love is a quest for comforting illusion. Waiting at its end **is only a Blue Fairy, who will, if you're** as lucky as David, bring that illusion to life, and once that life ends, let you follow it into oblivion.

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Mr. Robert

Kinoshita had a much wider career than designing the three robots we praise him for, but for *Tobor the Great*, Robbie from *Forbidden Planet* and the robot shouting “Danger, Will Robinson!” from *Lost in Space* he earned science fiction immortality. *Challenger* salutes his memory and his creations!

Richard Lynch unites rock'n'robots...



Dōmo Arigatō, Mr. Roboto

“The problem's plain to see: Too much technology. Machines to save our lives. Machines de-humanize...”

It was more than 36 years ago, back in February 1983, that a rock band from Chicago released a truly groundbreaking album.

It was **Styx's** *Kilroy Was Here*, the last (as it turned out) in a series of concept albums that had made the group famous and commercially successful. Whereas previous albums had focused on **the themes of chasing one's dreams** (*The Grand Illusion* in 1977 and *Pieces of Eight* in 1978) and a **homage to one of Chicago's splendid old-time movie palaces** (*Paradise Theatre* in 1981), *Kilroy* told a dark tale about a dystopian future where rock music has been outlawed by a fascist and fundamentalist totalitarian government which **had embraced 'dehumanizing' technologies**. The album had two hit singles which both reached the top ten of the *Billboard* Hot 100 Chart but it was the airplay of the first of them, “Mr. Roboto” as a music video on MTV which provided immense publicity for **the band's** “Kilroy Was Here” North American tour of 1983.

And where the album *Kilroy* was innovative, the “Kilroy” tour was even more so. It opened with a 10-minute film which introduced and provided the background for Robert Orrin Charles Kilroy (portrayed by Styx lead singer Dennis DeYoung), who had once been the most famous rock musician in a dark alternate history version of America. He had been branded a rebel by the government and was framed and imprisoned for the murder of an anti-rock fanatic on the stage of his final concert, at the Paradise Theatre in Chicago. Kilroy manages to escape by sabotaging one **of the automaton 'Mr. Roboto' prison guards and meets up** with his greatest fan, a rebel named Jonathan Chance (portrayed by Styx guitarist and lead singer Tommy Shaw) who had hacked into a **broadcast network to play some of Kilroy's music as an indication that the rebellion was still alive**. Kilroy then starts to tell Chance the true version of the events during that terrible night at the Paradise. **Fade to black...and the concert began.**

It was a rock opera. Once the opening video ended, the band Styx became the band Kilroy and the concert became a flashback to the music and events of that night at the Paradise, complete with on-stage acting between DeYoung and Shaw in their characters' personas. **The songs on the *Kilroy* album were the narrative line but intermixed were some of Styx's best songs, including “Lorelei”,**

“Rockin’ the Paradise”, “Blue Collar Man”, “Crystal Ball”, “Too Much Time on My Hands”, “The Best of Times”, “Fooling Yourself”, and “Come Sail Away”. During the song “Renegade”, near the end of the concert, roadies portraying the censorship police rushed onto the stage to arrest the band. And then the flashback ended. The concert came to a close with Kilroy passing the mantle to Chance while urging him to “Don’t Let It End”.

Back in 1983, my wife Nicki and I were fans of the band. Styx had been (in my opinion) unfairly branded with the reputation, even then, of being overly middle-of-the-road but their best songs, just about all of which they played in the concert, made for an excellent evening of music. It was, at that time, the best concert I had ever attended, and it was so good that Nicki and I saw it twice – once in Chattanooga and again about a month later over in Murfreesboro where the venue acoustics were much better.

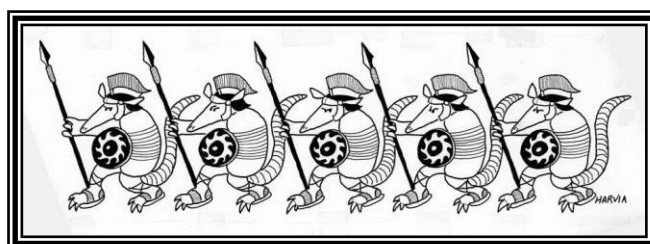
It’s still possible to re-live parts of the concert, as the 10-minute prologue movie can be found on YouTube, as can a video of the concert that was released under the title *Caught in the Act*. But they are both relatively low quality video transfers, and the concert looks like it was recorded and edited on the cheap with several songs omitted and jumpy transitions from one song to the next. Not a good viewing experience.

So, in the end, did it all work? It was an ambitious undertaking, entirely the idea of DeYoung who had wanted to make each new Styx project better and more grandiose than the previous one. But it later became known that the rest of the band was ambivalent and in some cases hostile to the **concept**. **Shaw and Styx’s lead guitarist James Young** had wanted the group to become more of a straightforward rock and roll band, but many of its biggest hits were ballads written by DeYoung. This had created a growing divide in the years leading up to the Kilroy album and tour, and in the aftermath of the tour it was enough to break up the band. DeYoung was in effect fired and went his own way. Styx still exists as a band, but in their concerts they never play “Mr. Roboto”.

But as for me, I think it actually did work. It was a grand, truly memorable multimedia experience. I remember that the audience in the sold-out arenas was so supercharged that their energy transitioned over to the band, which gave very polished performances both of those evenings in spite of all the dissention amongst the band that was going on in the background.

There’s one other thing I want to mention before I end this essay – in addition to its talents for creating a long string of pop music hits, Styx could also have been a really good cover band. There was a short epilog video at the end of the concert which provided all the credits for the tour (including one for the famous movie special effects wizard Stan Winston, who had created the ‘Mr. Roboto’ masks), and the audio track behind that was a cover by Styx of Chuck Berry’s “Rock and Roll Music”. *Really good*. But, as far as I know, it’s never been included in any Styx album and that epilog video, if it still exists, has never found its way to YouTube. I’d like to see it – just to *listen* to it – again, and I’m still looking.

I’ve been to a lot of rock music concerts in my life, but those two in the early summer of 1983 were among the best, especially the one in Murfreesboro. Thanks for the memories, Styx. *Dōmo arigatō!*





Illo by Kurt Erichsen

'Tis a Pity She's an Android

W.J. Donovan

He first met Greta at Bill's G.E.M. (Galactic Endeavour Memorabilia) bar in 2068, three years after his wife Anne Hawkins – a galactic superhero – died of radiation poisoning from captaining the first successful mission to Mars. Joe was in no shape to join the dating game after her death and to be honest he suspected he never would be – he had tried – but it always ended the same way, awkward conversations leading nowhere. So on one of the many drunken binges at Bill's place his old service buddy expertly escorted him toward one of the back rooms where paying clients could get more than just shit-faced on the rocket fuel Bill kept behind his 1960's themed bar. He drifted past chrome hub caps, license plates and tried to escape but Bill had kept in shape and was way less inebriated.

Joe protested that he didn't need any plastic pussy – even though synthetics are one hundred percent organic, just like you and me; not exactly like you and me of course, but definitely no metal parts – he was adamant he was not going down on any oily, old, android fucking whore.

Bill just laughed and pushed Joe into the room and locked the door behind him.

"Get on with it Joe, **it's on the house.**"

Joe stumbled into the nondescript room, there was a bondage reel playing on the wall screen. He motioned with his hand to turn it **off when a woman's soft hand grabbed his and** forcefully pushed him down onto the bed. She turned off the wall screen reel and replaced it with a tropical beach of animated paradise, he had to admit the splashing waves did have a somewhat soothing effect on his wasted self.

He decided to chill out and enjoy the show, she was only a Synth, no questions asked, guaranteed; unlike the dates he had fucked up. Joe stopped protesting and decided to let her do her thing. She seemed to realize that conversation was not on the menu and proceeded to commit unspeakable acts upon his inebriated body.

He knew he was in trouble when she hand-cuffed him to the bed post. The worst of it was eased by the whiskey but she was still one mean son of a bitch; his nipples ached for days.

Perhaps on some level he wanted it, to feel

pain, to ease the guilt.

Joe had sold the sub-orbital transport company and retired. Apart from his routine visits to Bill's place of business he was almost a recluse. Fame, even the reflected glory from a famous dead spouse, soon dies on the vine as a social asset; it just gets boring having to recount the inevitable narrative, the questions probing after his emotional adjustment, yadda, yadda, yadda.

With Greta it was simple, turn up Thursdays (after a skin-full of Jack) lay back and take the punishment. Boy could she dole it out, like she took pride in inflicting pain on the poor human soul. One night she had an **inquisitor's cloak on over her close-cut, blood-red, studded-leather uniform.**

It was not all pain, sometimes Greta would get playful and take me on a slightly different journey: gently with her tongue, doing all the hard work until eventually I lost control. Everything was just peachy until she surprised me one Thursday and opened her mouth for something other than the usual. He was so surprised you could have knocked him down with an ostrich feather.

Her voice – like the rest of her – was full on sizzle; those boys at Synthetic Central had it down to a fine art.

“You still have 17.3 minutes of credit; would you like to talk?”

After using one of his socks to wipe himself clean he eventually looked up at her.

“Call me Joe.”

“Call me Greta, you can call me any time.”

He laughed, Joe couldn't tell if she was playing dumb, or if she was fooling with him.

She rolled her eyeballs in mock frustration and made a lunge for his still very active manhood.

“Disengage usual client sub-routines.”

Joe was curious.

She went blank, blinked twice and froze for all of half a second and then looked directly at him, like it was the first time she actually saw him. She relaxed, got up and put her clothes on, like she was coy, perhaps her sub-routines acted like booze did for him.

“**You're an A.S. Model?**”

She looked like a model, even with her clothes on.

“Advanced Synthetic: second generation, upgraded intuitive programme.”

“Are you telling me you've been giving me the harsh treatment all these months because you felt I needed to be punished?”

“I did a background check, psychological evaluation and put two and two together so I could give you the best experience possible.”

“So why did you ask me to talk if your smart enough **to work out that's the last thing I want?**”

“Some clients want to talk.”

“They come here for sex?”

“Some are lonely.”

“You think I'm lonely?”

“Your hormonal activity and overall hormonal balance indicate an 87.4% chance your social interaction is not satisfying to you on an interpersonal level; in simplistic terms you appear to be sad.”

“So you want to be my confidant?”

“I can offer advice on a level as that of a qualified human counsellor, or I can just shut **up and listen, it's up to you.**”

“Did Bill put you up to this Greta, I could throttle him sometimes.”

“It was you who asked me to drop my normal client behaviour sub-routines and violence is a criminal offence Joe.”

“I was joking.”

“Very good. I'm still learning on the job as they say.”

“How many clients have you had?”

“Six thousand, three hundred and thirty-**seven; I remember every one, it's how I learn.**”

Joe leaned back and couldn't help but admire Greta's convincing tan job. Facially she was somewhere between olive skinned Mediterranean with a slight touch of Haitian. She was simply stunning. He wondered who decided on the aesthetics but then he remembered Synth's were designed by machines for humans to use in any way they liked.

“Is that from a client?”

There was scar tissue on the right of her abdomen.

"I could have had it removed at the body shop; it's a reminder."

"Of what?"

"You."

Joe nodded and looked at the slight asymmetry of her physique. Her breasts were slightly lopsided, one nipple a little darker and larger than the other, a birthmark roughly the shape of a tiny Madagascar on her inner right thigh, an odd, almost purple set to her blue eyes, a heightened shade of skin, an amalgam of beautifully crafted minor imperfections that gave the lie the overall impression of flawlessness.

"You are beautiful."

"For a Synth."

"No. Just beautiful."

"Should I be flattered?"

"Are you capable of such an emotion?"

"I have assimilated the ability to approximate your human spectra of emotion with a coded hormonal response; I have become used to emotion, I can relate to it in human terms."

"Are those responses turned on now?"

"No."

"Would you consider engaging them?"

"Why?"

"Oh, I don't know, it's nice to be human sometimes."

"If you say so, I turn them off most of the time."

"I would have thought them fascinating to a machine."

"There is a curiosity – of the mind – to immerse completely in emotive response; but in my experience some clients demand a more clinical approach."

He looked at her again and tried to imagine what Greta must endure to satisfy certain individuals.

"That scar?"

"An incident where my ability to mute emotions to a limited feedback curve proved more than congenial."

"You turned it off?"

"I can turn it off, or lower it, and also subdue pain response."

"To fake it."

"It is preferable to endure a little pain than

have certain clients commit murder due to their lack of stimulation, everyone needs some form of emotional release. Unfortunately, some humans have a missing part in the brain that does not allow them to empathise. That and a certain DNA profile can be dangerous to other humans."

"Thus breathes Greta."

"Simulated breathing, my energy requirements do not need oxygenation."

"Useful for those needing to strangle you."

"Now you've got it Joe. That's my job, **satisfy psycho's so they don't take** it out on the likes of you."

"I thought it was in your programming to go beyond the vocation to satisfy us bags of bone and blood."

"I have developed other interests."

"Such as?"

"Sorry Joe, your times up, we can pick this **up next Thursday if you're still** interested."

Joe grabbed his clothes and shambled out the door and was nearly knocked over by the next inebriated client.

He had completely forgotten he was on a clock, that she was a synthetic whore and he had to leave. He shook his head and laughed a ludicrous situation. She was a biological construct, nothing more.

"Next week." He muttered under his whiskey breath as he hailed a taxi in the wintry swell of sleet and rain. He turned back a moment and enjoyed watching the twenty-foot-tall neon hooker wink at him, he imagined she winked at everyone. He got into the taxi and slammed the door against the dirty night.

Next week felt odd. For a start she did not shackle Joe to the bed post. To be completely frank, even shit-faced Joe felt like a fish out of water.

"So what sort of week have you had Greta?"

That's when she started to cry. He was lost for words and soon joined her on the bed and gave her a hug that went on for a very long time. She held on to him and did not stop sobbing until it was time to leave. He did not want to leave.

That's when Joe decided to buy her. It was unusual to buy the more expensive Mark Two models, people usually rented, but he was not

short of funds after the sale of the company. Money doth have its uses.

There was a knock on the door and the delivery man asked Joe to sign for her.

"Come in silly this is your new home for as long as you like."

She came in like a scared cat, looking furtively at his minimal chrome furniture and immediately started to snoop around the house, checking out the paintings, books and his one extremely valuable David Smith welded steel sculpture. Sometime later she joined him in the open kitchen area.

"Why?"

"I couldn't stand the thought of you crying, it was hurting me just to think about it."

"I'm yours. You own me."

"Sort of. As far as I'm concerned, your you and not anyone else's, but legally when I die unfortunately you revert back to the property of Synthetics Central. I tried to fix it that you became your own property – a sort of manumission – but there is no legal precedent and the battle in court would drain even my well-endowed bank account rather promptly."

"Thank you Joe."

"Something to drink or eat, I know you don't have to but after reading your manual it said you can derive pleasure from it, if not actually use it for energy."

"I'm OK, I think I just want to rest."

Joe showed her to the bedroom: they undressed each other. This time it was different, slower, harmonic, unfolding into a unique crossroads of pleasure. The ultimate sexual gratification all wrapped up in one lovely bundle of ecstasy. Not surprising, as Greta knew him inside and out on a psychological level he doubted another human would ever equal, even Anne.

Joe tried not to think that was money well spent; perhaps Greta had engineered the whole poor me thing but he was soon swamped wondering how he could be so joyful loving another soul when he was certain she did not possess one. Like so many enigma's in his life Joe decided he liked the mystery more than an answer.

"How did you get the name Greta?"

"General Relationship Engineered Tactile Android: G.R.E.T.A. Mark Two, the first artificial intelligence equipped with hormonal fused emotions."

"Quite a mouthful."

"As seen on Holo-Vid and used on Mars."

"I told Bill I fell in love with an android."

"What did my old boss say about that?"

"He looked me straight in the eye and said he felt sorry for me."

"I hope you punched him in his eye."

"No, I didn't. I said I felt sorry for the android."

"Why would you say that?"

"Because one day I will die and I think you have feelings for me."

"I love you."

As the years slipped past people began to accept he was one of them; you know, those weirdo's who shack up with Synths. One of those guys who can't get a real woman. Greta was more real to him than anyone he had met before or since. Soon he forgot she was fabricated. They would stay up all night talking, she was an ardent student of history, a common interest.

As the years flashed by society gradually accepted loving a synthetic, bio-mimetic android was just another evolution in human behaviour and culture. The information gleaned from Synth's was crucial in A.I. development. The original human engineers knew it was crucial that they give A.I.'s the ability to empathise and understand humans emotionally as well as intellectually. He was happy to be a part of the experiment but not so ecstatic about what would happen to Greta when he stopped breathing. They were even sending them into deep space as part of A.S.P. (Asteroid Survey Protocol). Synths would save them from extinction, they might even pin a medal on one!

He hadn't forgotten his beloved Anne, but she gradually settled into the background as he became more and more used to his relationship with Greta. He even began to forget about his daughter, who would be ten next month. Joe thought his presence in her life would only

confuse things, she had a family and now and he had his. He was liking the new Joe.

“We should get married.”

“Not sure that's legal.”

“I looked into it, we can have a civic ceremony and I then become the second Mrs. Hawkins. Sorry Joe, I did not mean to upset you by saying that.”

“I know, let's do it anyway, should merit a column or two in the local rag.”

Actually it went viral all over the transnet, from Ceres to Jupiter station. The knives were out, opinion polarised from: Oh let him have his happiness to: How could he let this happen when he was married to the bravest women that walked the earth – and Mars. For a few months the curtains twitched suspiciously, they had hate mail; a sure sign of true celebrity. They decided to move after they sprayed graffiti all over Joe's electric Cadillac. We went ex-directory, we went to the moon.

The first lunar colonies had been up and running for more than twenty years, ever since we used Lunar Base as a convenient launch pad for further Mars resupply missions. Low gravity. How ironic I finally made it into space as a tourist. They stayed for three months at the Hilton and hoping the heat of celebrity had died down descended like gods to earth on pillars of flame. Just to be certain they changed their identities and moved to the Cayman Islands; very swish and way too expensive for your average paparazzi to visit.

He hoped they would pass for the usual decadent capitalist-pig and trophy wife. Greta looked a flawless twenty-something but Joe was starting to come apart at the seams. He did see if they could shove his brain into an android frame; one day they said, but not yet. Immortality pill, not on the market for a few more years.

He was running out of time and hair.

“You know in certain societies you would be termed the perfect woman.”

Greta was bending over the washing machine unloading an armful of clothes to dry in the cool breeze. The view from Joe's perspective was stunning.

“Perfect because I wash your dirty clothes?”

“And the rest.”

“It's in my nature to please you.”

“You have no idea how stimulating and rare that is.”

“I can imagine without my sub-routines a human woman would find you men less than appealing on occasion.”

“Half of all marriages end in divorce, maybe more.”

“It's a pity humans couldn't instigate their own sub-routines for happiness.”

“It's a complex space between our ears and heart valves.”

“It's been an education.”

Greta moved her wicker basket outside and started hanging out the washing with the old-fashioned wooden pegs they had bought one day at the local outdoor market. He joined her, whistling an old tune by the Beatles as the wind made snickering sails of their drying towels.

“I'm twelve years old today Joe.”

“Want to do anything special?”

Greta affected her best juvenile pout.

“Want to go sailing, daddy.”

“Deal.”

They made their way down the jetty after Greta prepared a quick packed lunch of tuna, olives and mango, all stowed away into a little picnic basket. Joe grabbed two big towels from the washing line, fresh with ocean tang and a hint of Oleander.

Their little boat was equipped with an outboard motor and a berth for two. Joe weighed anchor and headed toward the horizon. Everything was perfect, snorkelling among shoals of prismatic, glittering Parrot fish and even a Hawksbill sea turtle, sunbathing on deck, they even found a secluded cove and made love in the shade of some palm trees, it would have been hard to imagine a better birthday for his woman. Why he had to spoil it with a heart attack was beyond a joke. Luckily, he had shown Greta the ropes and she got him home quickly and rang for medical help. Fortunately, it was only a minor stroke and Joe made a full recovery, but it highlighted the same problem.

“Joe, I don't want to continue when you go.”

“I know.”

Joe gave her a lingering kiss, they were both naked and sweaty.

“There is a solution.”

Joe purchased the twin handguns from an old army contact, he tested them, took them apart and kept them oiled in tip-top shape. He made them both practice with them until stripping them down and firing at the shooting range became almost second nature. There could be no mistakes, timing was everything.

They had four more amazing years together, but after the second heart attack Joe knew his days were literally numbered, it was inevitable.

“These are armour-piercing rounds and will splatter our brains all over the place.”

“Even through my reinforced skull.”

“Rip through titanium, carbon fibre, anything, military grade hardware, the best money can buy.”

He indulged in a cloak of quality weed and whiskey to mask the worst of his now daily companion; pain. It was time. They lay on the bed, spooning like shiny lovers. Greta picked hers up and looked down the sight, feeling the weight, she clicked off the safety; she had become quiet the marksman. Joe hefted his and rested it against Greta's forehead, she mirrored Joe's action perfectly.

They counted down.

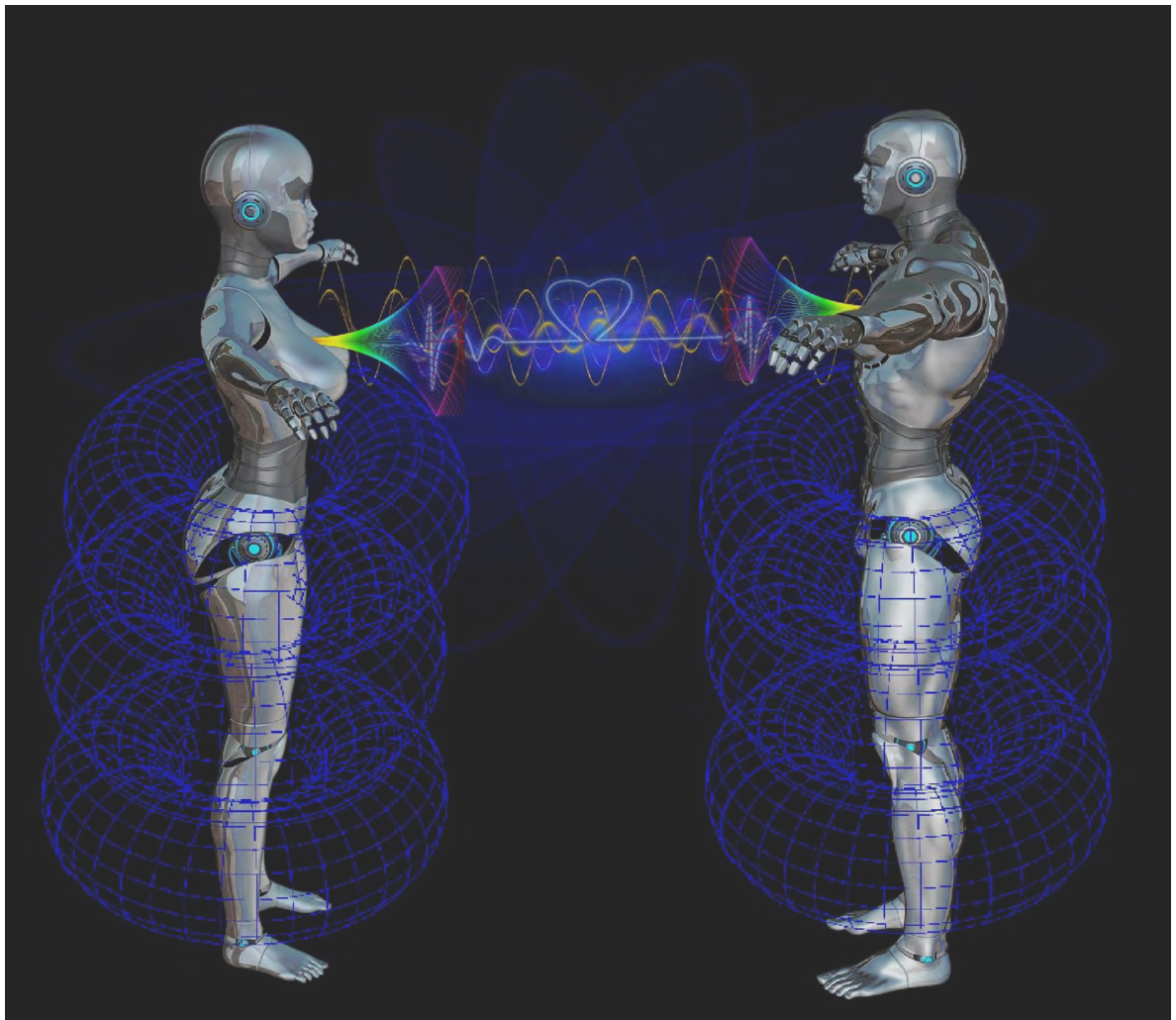
Squeezed slowly.

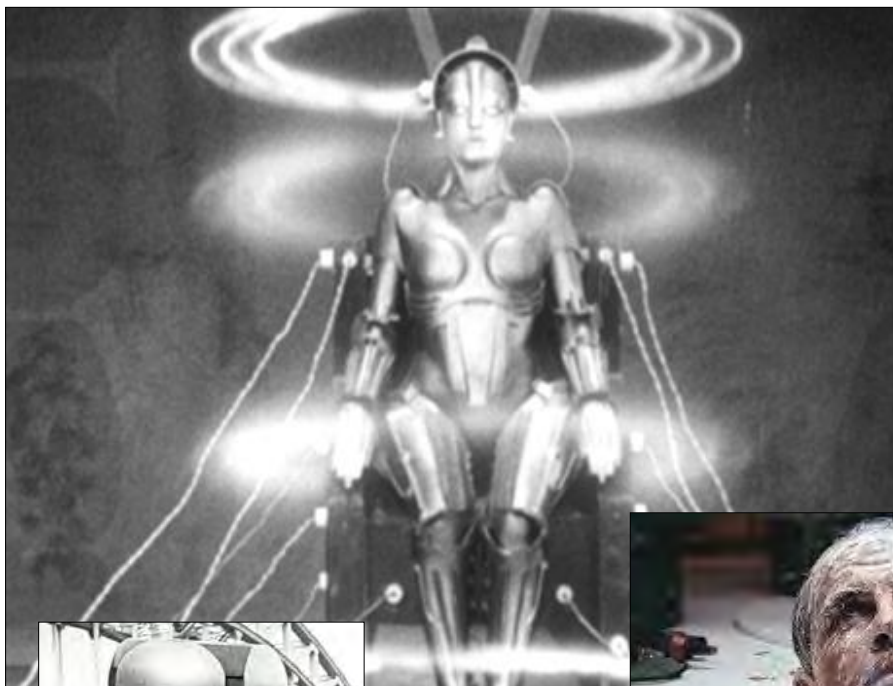
Gently increasing the pressure.

“One Mississippi.”

“Two Mississippi.”

Boom.





Guy
Lillian



THEY WALKED LIKE MEN



"There are people among us who are biologically human but who are androids in the metaphoric sense." – Philip K. Dick, *Philip K. Dick: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*.

Robots, robots, robots ... science fiction and indeed, western popular culture has never been without artificial/mechanical/electronic life. Had this author the wit and time to examine the place of robots in our genre in proper detail, I'm sure I could fill an encyclopedia. I daren't try.

But I will look at the subject in terms of *perspectives* – the several dominant ways in which SF has dealt with those creatures who – **in Simak's title** – walked **like men**. It's an inadequate and probably sloppy way of dealing with the subject, but it serves a purpose. Why do we dwell on men made by men? What are we saying about the world, life, and ourselves?

I'm sure I'll find that automata were among the earliest of SF tropes. Alan Moore's *League of Extraordinary Gentleman* paid homage to Edward Ellis' 1868 dime novel, *The Steam Man of the Prairies*, and in April of 2019 "**Moxon's Master**", Ambrose Bierce's chiller about a chess-playing – and eventually murderous – automaton will note its 120th anniversary.



For all we know, the Steam Man was, like the artificial elephant in Jules Verne's *The Steam House*, little more than an exotic locomotive. But Moxon's gismo becomes something more than a novelty of gears and wires. **Through Bierce's genius, he becomes a menace** – p.o.ed enough at his creator, Moxon, to throttle the poor dope when he has the effrontery to beat him at the 64-square madhouse. (Translation: win a chess game.)

In this way the chess-machine falls into one of the classic perspectives of mechanical or artificial men – *menace*. Such was the impact of the most famous artificial man of all, the Frankenstein monster.

The monster is no robot, of course, but he is man-assembled and given life by artificial means. Like Moxon's thingamabob, he is capable of revenge and rage. The man-made man was menace incarnate, unholy, unnatural. Of course, in the case of Mary Shelley's creature, he embodies other things, principally isolation and abandonment, and came to stand as a metaphor for these agonies of the human condition. **There is profundity in Shelley's**

creation, not just horror. The fire brought down by her "New Prometheus" burns not just with

homicidal brutality, but recognizable human hurt. *Frankenstein* is the first great science fiction novel, and should establish **Mary as one of the field's founders, along with Verne, Wells and Poe.**

Horror never ceased being a major aspect of the science fiction robot. One has only to consider the original *Terminator* to see how that image has never faded from the collective imagination. But like the Frankenstein monster, robots have also kept their philosophical bent, as shown by the stage play where the species got its name. The word “robot,” as everyone



knows, comes from the famous play *R.U.R.* by Karel Capek. 2020 will mark **the play's** – and the **word's** – centennial. Translated from the Czech, it became a worldwide hit. A young Spencer Tracy acted in an American production. Why it attracted such good ink should be a mystery. The show we saw at Chicon V was “bravely played,” as I complimented one actor, but the cast spends a good chunk of the play standing at a window with their backs turned to the audience. You can barely hear them.

Nevertheless, the play and the word took. Part of that success may have been due to its theme of robots as *workers* (**isn't that the original translation?**) and the upheaval between ownership and labor that led to the Russian revolution and the formation of **labor unions**. Rossum's Universal Robots stood in for real-world people with real-world problems. The potential for robots in this metaphorical wise has been seldom since tapped. Rarely do we find a rich and complex tale such as “All the Traps of Earth”, where **a robot's long life** and unprogrammed development lead him to a greater appreciation for the capacities not of robotics, but of mankind.

Possibly the most annoying utilization of automatons in fiction, written and cinematic, have been *cute* robots – the influence of the most popular robots in film history gone amok.

Robots, do I say? Try “droids.” R2D2 and C3PO **are science fiction's best-known comic relief, and they've achieved such universal acceptance that** no SFer in his right mind would chide George Lucas for creating them. But *Star Wars'* **celestial** success led to a cavalcade of bad SF films featuring robots thought to be adorable – which, even in a pretty decent flick like *Millennium*, turned out cringeworthy. In *that* movie, you could see through Sherman **the robot's mask to the actor's teeth. Insisted on by the producer,** Sherman set the **audience's** teeth *on edge*.



Of course, adorable robots existed independently of *Star Wars* and are so prevalent they're effectively a genre of their own. *I, Robot*, Isaac Asimov's seminal work with positronic creatures, included "Robbie", after all, and later, his "The Bicentennial Man" turned into a nightmare of cinematic sentimentality and schmaltz via poor Robin Williams. A grown person could barely sit through *The Black Hole*. The Disney film tries both to tickle pre-teeners with its ridiculous robots and to mimic *2001* by waxing profound about the nature of Evil. This attempt at profundity reaches its symbolic zenith when, entering the surreality of the title object, madman Hans Reinhardt is brought face to face with his evil electronic creation, Maximilian. That star Maximilian Schell allowed the studio to name the idiotic thing after him is second in offensiveness only to his agreement to embarrass himself by appearing in the movie.

But cute is not always awful. Two of the most famous robots in movie history are audience-pleasing, kid-friendly characters. What name in SF lore resonates more happily than Robby the Robot from *Forbidden Planet*? Perhaps it's the plucky title dude named WALL-E.

Robby is depicted in early posters for *Forbidden Planet* as a monster clutching a hot, helpless blonde in his mechanical arms. In the green-skied reality of the film, he's anything but menacing. Ariel in this more-than-modern *Tempest*, Robby is an essential character, not just a prop, providing not only comic relief with Earl Holliman but holding the material center of the movie. Robby is one of the reasons I consider *Forbidden Planet* to be the most accessible and intelligent of SF entertainments. (What of *2001*, you protest? I reply, I said "accessible." I still have arguments with other fans over the meaning of that masterwork.)

Intelligent – but subject to question. Robby is the only example of Krell-influenced technology to survive the planet-busting cataclysm at the close of the film. The rest is left behind, presumably because the Earthmen fear that the Krell's promethean knowledge would infect mankind. It's another example of the *Frankenstein* motif, men seeking forbidden knowledge restricted to God ... 16th Century thinking for a 22nd Century story. What if the captain played by Leslie Nielsen had the wit to have Robby rip out the illuminated encyclopedia of Krell theorems and bring it along? Would we succumb to

the temptation of "creation without instrumentalities"? Would we release "monsters from the id" and trash everyone and everything in an orgy of primal racial lust?

Or would we be like the remnants of humanity found in space by Wall-E, and slouch and grow fat in automated easy chairs?



WALL-E is another of science fiction's masterpieces, an amiable, accessible story with a charming lead character and a strong satirical and cautionary understory. Disney promoted films for kids with life lessons imbedded, and *Wall-E* reinforces that epic tradition. The character's mechanical nature isn't part of the environmental message of the movie, but provides anthropomorphic laughs and pathos as he – note I said “he” – leads surviving humanity into reviving good old Earth. Reminiscent of “All the Traps of Earth” ...

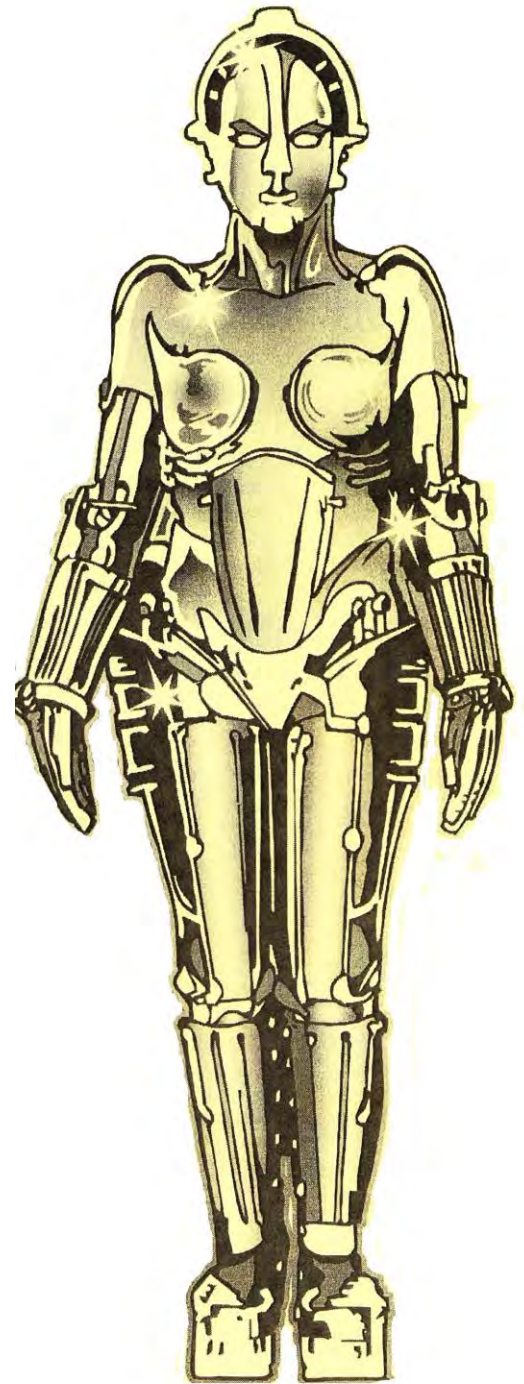
WALL-E takes us into an area of independence and consciousness robots didn't inhabit through much of their literary/cinematic lives. For a long time they were seen as tools, programmed weapons manipulated behind by schemers. The most fearsome of these I believe to be one of this *Challenger's* cover subjects – Maria of *Metropolis*. (Poor Brigitte Helm had to wear the suit in every scene – over her raw skin!)

There are few science fiction works that can honestly be described as high art, which requires aspiration to timelessness and unmatched quality. *Subtext* is required in such a work, an underpinning of significance beyond its plot, beyond its setting. *2001* is such a work, and so is *Metropolis* – at least, in its complete form. With the film's multitudinous cuts restored, as they mostly are in the most recent version, the Biblical and sociopolitical bases of the story become clearer than ever before.

The purpose behind Rotwang's robot emerges from the comedy of her silly seductive dance; we see her at last as a weapon being wielded against Metropolis and its ruler by the mad Rotwang in revenge for his lost love, Hel. She is loosed both as a terrorist and as the Whore of Babylon, creating havoc and disunion in one role and the civic disaster of decadence and unrestrained carnality on the other. She is the embodiment of the 7 Deadly Sins, the toppler of Babylon – but she never acts for herself. She is Rotwang's deadly instrument.

Likewise, generations later, we see another robot utilized as a weapon – Ash, Ian Holm's smarmy pretender in *Alien*. His evil is not really his; he is obeying programmed orders to recover the Alien, “all other priorities rescinded.” It's safe to assume that his free will is restricted to service of his mission, murderous as it turns out to be. Mindful of the neutrality of “artificial persons” (he doesn't like the slang term “synthetic”), Lance Henrikson's Bishop, equipped with Asimovian “inhibitors,” is a hero of *Aliens* – but except for the capacity to survive being torn in half by the Alien Queen, isn't much different than anyone else. This observation is no complaint about *Aliens*, mind you. It's still the only movie I've stood in line two nights in a row to see.

Robots who act and are treated just as members of a team have been pretty common across the media: Data, with his incomprehensible Pinocchio-ish desire to be a genuine human being, is integrated pretty completely into the crew of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and a comics freak





like “Your Favorite Guy” **can’t help but remember fondly** Ilda, sensible secretary/”girl” Friday to the goofy future detective, *Star Hawkins*. This panel, by Gil Kane, shows them off splendidly, although the *Strange Adventures* strip by John Broome was usually drawn by Mike Sekowsky. (Readers are referred to *Don Markstein’s Toonopedia* for further detail.)

Writers taking a more mature view of mechanical persons – or do robots have juridical rights? (the definition of “persons” in legalese) – have often used them to comment **on the foibles of human characters.** Ray Bradbury’s electric grandmother in “I Sing the Body Electric” **performs this task.** I think also of the malfunctioning ‘bot of *The Stars My Destination* who starts out responding “robotically” to Gully Foyle’s conversation but, corrupted by Dagerham’s radiation, **explodes in righteous invective at mankind’s foolishness.** Shalmaneser in John Brunner’s opus *Stand on Zanzibar* is not a robot – suspended in super-cooled liquid, the computer cannot “walk like a man” – but often lends its “cool and detached view” to observations of its creators. (I tell you three times!)

And there is little in modern cinema to match Roy Batty’s dying words in *Bladerunner*, as its most savage replicant teaches us, with a few sentences, what it means to be a human being. Actor Rutger Hauer rewrote the speech **himself. It’s Batty’s, Hauer’s and *Bladerunner’s*** inscription in the book of the world:

I’ve seen things you people wouldn’t believe. Attacked ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhäuser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears in rain. Time to die.

I may have that penultimate line inscribed on my tombstone.

A necessary aside: *Bladerunner*, though it won a Hugo and was rightfully acclaimed for its *look*, was initially crippled by a moronic voiceover and a laughable happy ending. Versions that followed eliminated both, to the inestimable benefit of the film. Also abandoned was the soul-crushing idea of making hero Rick Deckard **himself a replicant, which would have gutted the purpose of Hauer’s salvation of Deckard and what influence Phil Dick’s spirit still retained over the film.** Thank *God* the idea died on the vine.



In January, 1939, there appeared in *Amazing Stories* the first of ten tales of science fiction's first great robot hero. Does it surprise you that he was **Adam Link**?

Adam was the creation of **Eando Binder**, pen name of **Earl and Otto Binder**. Otto did most of the writing for *Amazing*; among his many works, these:

- "I, Robot" (January 1939)
- "The Trial of Adam Link, Robot" (July 1939)
- "Adam Link in Business" (January 1940)
- "Adam Link's Vengeance" (February 1940)
- "Adam Link, Robot Detective" (May 1940)
- "Adam Link, Champion Athlete" (July 1940)
- "Adam Link Fights a War" (December 1940)
- "Adam Link in the Past" (February 1941)
- "Adam Link Faces a Revolt" (May 1941)
- "Adam Link Saves the World" (April 1942)

Otto, like Julie, later moved on to work in comic books, writing *Captain Marvel* for Fawcett and a slew of stuff for DC – including the first *Supergirl* story! But it's the noble robot with the longing for humanity that *Challenger* celebrates here.



Adam, like so many robots in science fiction, yearns for the **rights and fellowship of man**, earning such status through his trial for murder, his efforts in business (!), his ro(bot)mance with a lady robot named – what else? – Eve, his battles on behalf of the human race. The writing style is straightforward, the stories are simple and finally, rather sweet. Adam fits in with the idea of the robot as a projection of our own innocence and hopes for acceptance.

It's about time I mentioned our beloved Dr. Isaac Asimov; no one, after all, is more closely associated with robots in our genre. Author of the Three Laws, which see his positronic people as potential menaces who must be rigidly controlled, he created mecha characters who served as partners to human beings – of course, I mean R. Daneel Olivaw of *The Caves of Steel* and *The Naked Sun*. His "cool and detached view" assists Lije Baley in solving crimes and incidentally provides righteous entertainment for readers.

But the partnership between Baley and Olivaw morphs, in **Asimov's** fiction, in several questionable ways. His "Bicentennial Man" won awards with its skillful sentimentality, but in the Susan Calvin stories of his magnificent *I, Robot* – certainly among the essential SF publications – he seems to push a frankly terrifying concept: robots as *homo superior*.



The one time I met Asimov, at a *Star Trek* convention in New York, ca. 1974, I asked him in a Q&A session about this judgment. Did he regard artificial men as *superior* to the human beings who created them? His answer was unequivocal: yes.

Anyone familiar with Dr. A's persona would know better than to take any opinion as extreme as this at face value. Such misanthropy, if serious, would qualify as psychopathic, and few among us were as healthy and hearty mind-wise as the good Doctor. I suspect this alleged conviction to be a posture – or the fantasy of a genius frustrated with the more limited wits **he's had to live among. So he writes "The Last Question" and – SPOILER ALERT –** postulates the evolution of a computer into a deity. Perhaps **taking his cue from his compatriot's Cosmic AC, Arthur C. Clarke created HAL 9000 for 2001 – but unlike Dr. Asimov's A.I., makes it vulnerable to a glitch which imbues** a human frailty into its programming.

Other stories have placed robots atop us in the food chain of civilization. The idea is basic: human society has suffered from war and politics and religion and all other ills because of the imperfectability and irrational flexibility of human thought. Emotion gets in the way of solutions to our problems, all of which are susceptible to reason, which is basic to the codified logic of the robot mind.

So we get Gnut in "Farewell to the Master" and, subsequently, Gort in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. There, in another SF film of unique intelligence and quality, we find a robot police force to which human beings – assuming we call Klaatu and Company human, and why not? – have surrendered ultimate judicial power. The robots sense "aggression" and act against it with terrifying finality. *FOOSH*

That a societal fault like aggression may be subject to argument and dispute is undoubtedly a **problem Klaatu's planetears have addressed. They're not the sorts to leave such obvious questions open. It's important**, of course, to realize that Gort is still under human control – **Klaatu's orders** are instantly obeyed – **but when Michael Rennie is killed, Gort's Judge Dredd protocol** automatically kicks in, and goodbye, Mr. Easy Breezy.

A.I. control over human society, deemed almost inevitable and laudable by Asimov through Susan Calvin, found expression in *Colossus: The Forbin Project*, where the superior, emotionless paragon of machine logic shows itself indifferent and even hostile to the humans it allegedly exists to benefit. The book and film suggest there might indeed be a benefit to injecting humanity into blinkum-thinkums – logic does have its limitations, after all. Or is it also self-evident to you that it's acceptable to kill ten thousand handicapped people to keep one genius alive?

There is one aspect to robot fiction which needs to be covered, and watch out: the double-entendres will flourish. After all, if mecha men and women are a master race, superior to unprogrammable and unreliable *homo saps* as soldiers, astronauts, policemen, or presidents, why should they not be more satisfying *lovers*?



The robot as fantasy object has shown up throughout the history of science fiction, a superior and more accepting partner for lonely souls than any demanding, reluctant, mutable, fickle creature of flesh. “Helen O’Loy” is a cybernetic housewife loyal and compliant. Asimov’s painful *Robots of Dawn* features a being/device whose only qualities are a pleasing surfer-boy shell and an ability to cantilever on demand. In movies, the execrable *Making Mr. Right* gifts solitary women with a walking dildo named Ulysses, and a happy ending where his lookalike inventor goes into space in his stead, since as a living human being, he prefers loneliness. Of course, *A.I.* gives us Jude Law as a robot gigolo (see my reprinted article elsewhere in this issue), and the ultimate purpose for the robot in Ted Chiang’s 2010 Hugo winner, “The Lifecycle of Software Objects”, is seemingly to serve the heroine as lover. Even the absurd cinematic hairball *Creation of the Humanoids* (see below) and Julie Newmar’s awful sitcom *My Living Doll*, both from the ‘60s, feature such cosmic miscegenation. *I Love Lucite* ... how could it fail?

The despair in these stories is evident: they’re about the impossibility of *human* relationships. To understand and truly love another frail organic creature is a challenge some find too arduous. We human critters are stubborn, we’re stupid, we’re complicated, we’re driven, we’re irrational, we’re *individual* – and knowing us, loving us takes real commitment, real work, and very often, real pain. Choose a robot instead, these works tell us. Why go through all that?



The best robot story I have ever seen tells us *exactly* why. We find it in, and on

The TWILIGHT ZONE

Yes, the best robot story I have ever seen appeared on *The Twilight Zone* – Rod Serling’s **original**, the show marked by intelligent, well-paced scripts and crisp reveals, the show that grabbed Boomer fans and indeed, helped us become fans. (I discovered the show with its third episode – no robots – at age 10. Hooked, gaffed, thrown into the boat, onto the plate and smeared with tartar sauce!) Of all 156 episodes, I choose four to speak on – all involving robots. There are others, like “Uncle Simon” and “**The Brain Center at Whipple’s**”, but while the presence of Robby the Robot provokes cheers in both, the shows are hackneyed and predictable. Plus there’s “The Mighty Casey”, a

brilliant comic entertainment which is and needs be nothing more.



But the same cannot be said of “Steel”, a dandy half hour about a future – 1974; it was the future *then* – in which prizefighting between human beings has been banned. Robots have been created to take the punches. **The desperate manager (Lee Marvin) of a busted ‘bot takes its place in the ring against a superior robot in order to collect their fee, and in the process gets the punkin’ knocked out of him. Though smashed to bits, he resolves to persevere, a triumph for man’s spirit over mechanical strength. Richard Matheson, it’s said, liked this episode more than any other *Zone* he ever wrote.**

One can see why. “Steel” has a purity and economy that sustains the story throughout. Lee Marvin is magnificent – as always – and the actors playing the robots are spookily effective. However, there **isn’t much to the ‘bots themselves; they’re super-primitive, have no will and perform only as programmed.**



The question I asked at the beginning of this article has yet to be answered: what is the attraction of robot stories? **We’ve seen these simulacra utilized as cute comic relief, monsters (from the id and otherwise), partners to human protagonists, commentators on human frailty – and pliant lust objects. Harkening back to my early childhood, and daring to venture that in this way I was not wholly out of step with the rest of my generation, I’d hazard a guess that kids identify with ‘bots.**

Bear with me. A child’s alienation is complex and confusing. Lurking in our febrile consciousness is the idea that *we’re not really real*. That we’ll find out that we’re robots, or aliens, or scraps of someone’s imagination, or mannequins (hello, Marcia White!), and that we can be disposed of. I’m not sure where this particular paranoia comes from, but it’s genuine, and two of the *Twilight Zone* episodes dealing with robots play off it. “The Lateness of the Hour” takes place in an isolated

mansion inhabited by a retired physicist (John Hoyt), his wife, daughter (the great and tragic Inger Stevens) – and robot staff. Perhaps the only *TZ* **appropriate to the show's six-episode** experiment with videotape, the scene is glum, dark, claustrophobic, isolate – qualities the daughter is **thoroughly sick of. She blames the family's separation from the world on their dependency on the** robot staff, and browbeats the father into dismantling the simulacra. Now, she proclaims, we can *live*, and “I can meet a young man,” **and ... why are her parents blanching?**

Of course, that's when Inger Stevens' character discovers that she, too, is a robot, created to fill a void in the parents' lives, and has no identity of her own. Unwilling to lose her completely, Hoyt drains her mind, remakes her into a muscle-massaging maid, and fade to black.

A *bit* more affirmative about the human/inhuman dilemma is “In His Image”, first of the hour-long *TZ*s. Usually the 4th season episodes seem awkward, padded, poorly paced – witness (if you will) “He Lives”, a preachy and predictable plaint against neo-Nazis starring the great (and friendly) Dennis Hopper. But unlike the other hour-longs, “In His Image” never sags under its own weight. A New Yorker named Alan Talbot (played by George Grizzard) is taking his shy fiancée Jess (Gail Kobe) to his upstate home town. En route he suffers a suspiciously sparky breakdown and snuffs a pesky evangelist. Remembering nothing of this, he and his lady fair find that his every memory of his home is askew – no family, no university job, no Alan Talbot. Another breakdown ensues, during which he chases off his girlfriend, has an accident, looks to his injured arm, and *voilà*.

Alan has been muttering the name “Walter” during his deliria, and has found a gravestone with a last name for Walter: Ryder. He looks him up in the phonebook and goes to his house. Walter, the true protagonist in the **story, appears: Alan's double. Actually, he is Alan's creator**, for Alan is a robot Walter created to fulfill his lifelong ambition – a perfect version of himself, since the version he lives in is a miserable, self-loathing drunk.



This is the point where “In His Image” becomes interesting, and outstrips in interest the similar set-up of a turkey like *Making Mr.*

Right or Ray Bradbury's **infinitely more skillful** “Marionettes, Inc.” Alan Talbot eventually *accepts* who he is – or rather, what he is. (“*Who is this wristwatch I'm wearing? Who is the refrigerator in the kitchen?*”) **He also understands Walter's problem. Rather than improve himself, Ryder is trying to impose himself on malleable metal and “non-conductive plastic.”** Alan urges Walter to reverse things, to meet and marry Jess, “and for the first time in his *miserable life ... to be happy!*”

But oops, here comes another electronic homicidal fit and an epic fight a la *Frankenstein*, creator vs. created, man vs. machine. Later, one of them shows up at Jess's apartment, **pledging to tell her** the full story – “someday.” Which one is it?

A viewer paying attention would know. Alan's right arm is inoperable; the fellow who shows up at Jess' uses his. But more telling is the absolutely ideal delivery Grizzard gives to his character's last line. Jess offers him breakfast. “**It'll make a new man of you!**” He hesitates, his mouth barely touching on a smile. “Thank you!” **It's Walter. He's defeated his robot, defeated his demons, and is on the verge of human happiness with a human person.**

Which is the promise at the seemingly tragic conclusion of the robot story I consider science **fiction's most** thoughtful and mature.

“The Lonely” was the 7th broadcast of *The Twilight Zone* and the first script produced after CBS



bought the series. Much of it was filmed in Death Valley, and as anyone can tell you who has visited that hellish corner of the universe, that venue is made for rough going. Makeup melted, crew members collapsed, heat stroke was a constant threat – no wonder production had to be moved back to a studio. Its star, Jack Warden, was a seasoned actor with credits in an Academy Award film – *From Here to Eternity* – and other righteous movies – *Twelve Angry Men*, *The Bachelor Party*, *Run Silent, Run Deep*, with many more to come. John Dehner had been acting for 15 years and already had a crowded resume (he would make three TZs in his career). By contrast, “The Lonely” **was only Jean Marsh’s 9th credit**. Married then to future *Doctor Who* Jon Pertwee, she received third billing, in much smaller type, than her co-stars. But the actress was on the brink of greatness: she had the co-creation and starring role in *Upstairs, Downstairs* ahead of her. She is still with us – and still gets asked about this role.

You know the plot. It opens on a metal shack in the midst of a barren desert. Says Rod Serling, in his narration:

Witness if you will, a dungeon, made out of mountains, salt flats, and sand that stretch to infinity. The dungeon has an inmate: James A. Corry. And this is his residence: a metal shack. An old touring car that squats in the sun and goes nowhere - for there is nowhere to go. For the record, let it be known that James A. Corry is a convicted criminal placed in solitary confinement. Confinement in this case stretches as far as the eye can see, because this particular dungeon is on an asteroid nine-million miles from the Earth. Now witness, if you will, a man's mind and body shriveling in the sun, a man dying of loneliness.

Forget the wretched science – *The Twilight Zone* always placed other planets, asteroids, even solar systems far closer to Earth than they truly are, and assumed that smaller celestial bodies could retain Earthlike gravity and atmosphere. (Cf. “Elegy”, another A+ *Twilight Zone* featuring a robot, Cecil Kellaway as Wickwire. Uhh ... “Wirewick.”) Also

forget, if you can, the way Dehner’s Captain Allenby pronounces “robot.” In any event, out of pity for Corry, a robot or “robut” is **just what he leaves to relieve Corry’s loneliness**.

She is Alicia, revived from her shipping crate by contact with the atmosphere and brought to “life” by the sound of her name. She has the simple form of a little woman.

Corry's initial reaction to his "robot" is fury. She "mocks" him "with the memory of women," he says, adding a core of sexual tension to his agony few TV shows would have acknowledged in those twin-bed times. He only relents in his anger towards Alicia when he sees that she *feels* –pain, **hunger, thirst ... and, she adds, loneliness.**

(One wonders about the purpose of investing these needs in a robot. Why did the engineers do that to her? Why did *God* do that to *us*?)

In his journal, given in voiceover, Corry states that he understands that the words, thoughts and emotions coming from Alicia are merely reflections of his own ... but his needs and emotions run deeper. He professes love for Alicia. **In Corry's mind, she becomes a real woman.**

But then, Allenby returns. Corry has been pardoned, the sadistic sentences of isolation on asteroids canceled forever. He will return to Earth. But he may take only 15 pounds of stuff with him – and Alicia weighs more than 15 pounds. When Corry leads Allenby and his crew to Alicia, to show them that she is human, Allenby shoots the robot in the face. She disintegrates into a mass of wires and circuits, her artificiality revealed, and "dies," calling for Corry in her slurring mechanical voice. Jean Marsh still gets asked to try to recreate the ghastly sound of his name, slowing and groaning into silence.



But **Alicia's demise isn't the end. Allenby speaks truth to Corry.** "All you're leaving behind," he says, "is loneliness." Corry realizes this is so. "I must keep that in mind."

SERLING: On a microscopic piece of sand that floats through space is a fragment of a man's life. Left to rust is the place he lived in and the machines he used. Without use, they will disintegrate from the wind and the sand and the years that act upon them. All of Mr. Corry's machines, including the one made in his image, kept alive by love, but now obsolete - in The Twilight Zone.

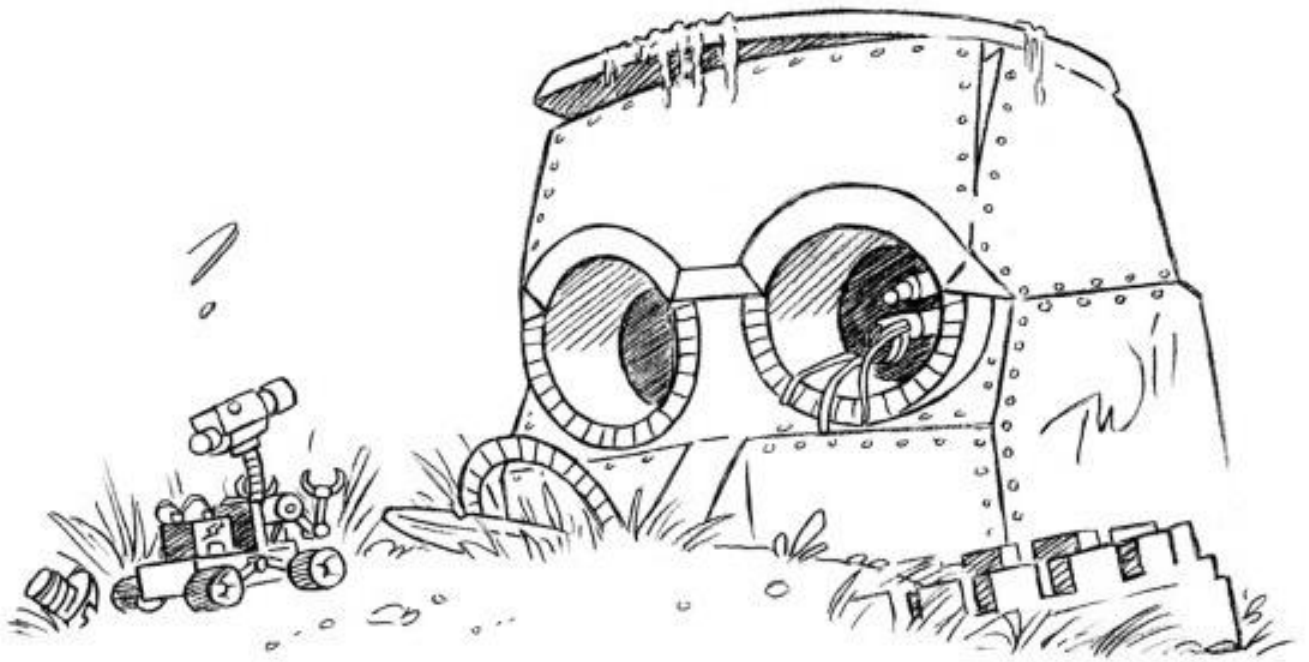
"The Lonely" is a remarkable show for many reasons, but one of its major qualities is how much information and feeling it packs into its words. Although the story could painlessly fit into a longer format, it never feels squeezed in its 25-minute running time. In that time, and through its words, it explores the nature of humanity, our need for one another, the nature of the material, and even the nature of love – **seeing and hearing and valuing one's self in another. Here there is no trace of Asimov's master race or mankind's failure; there is only human need and human frailty and human truth: Love flows from self-love.**



The story of robots in science fiction, as concluded so beautifully in “The Lonely” and “In His Image”, comes back to human experience. Roy Batty knows that; perhaps *ST: TNG*’s Data and *A.I.*’s David, in their Pinocchioan quests for “real humanity,” know it too. To paraphrase Philip K. Dick, in an introduction to one of his stories, *If we instill intelligence and feeling into material objects, wire and metal and plastics, then the material has not conquered us, we have conquered the material. If we make the unliving live, then it is life, not lifelessness, that has prevailed.*

Or as a robot asks in a story by Cordwainer Smith, the only other science fiction writer as humane, “May I go look at the live things now?”

Ripeness is all.



Illo by TARAL WAYNE

Fans of **Metropolis** and its seductive robot Maria are advised to visit YouTube and check out the amazing site **Simple Tricks & Nonsense**. Amongst the stunning cosplay and props re-created by the father/son team John and Johnny McDonald, find Rebeckah Cox’s Maria costume, as perfect as any we’ve ever seen.

THE SHADOW OF ALFRED BESTER

by Anthony Tollin



The 1944-45 season of *The Shadow* radio series introduced a new star, John Archer, and a new principal scriptwriter, Alfred Bester. The legendary science fiction author pounded out a dozen scripts for *The Shadow* during that season, and many more over the next decade.

Alfred Bester (1913-87) began his career writing for science-fiction pulps after studying psychology, science and law at the University of Pennsylvania. "I began writing when I graduated from college in 1935, only because I'd tried law and medicine, given them up, and was floundering around, wondering what to do with myself. I sold a few stories of the old pulp science fiction sort to *Thrilling Wonder* magazine (Ugh!), and then came the advent of comic books. This fantastic phenomenon exploded into a million dollar industry overnight, and there was a desperate search for writers could be trained to turn out scenarios for the artists."

Bester's entry into the four-color world of comics came at the invitation of his pulp mentors, the former editors of Standard Publications' *Thrilling Wonder Stories*.

"Mort Weisinger and Jack Schiff, editors at DC, drafted me as one of their writers. I hadn't the faintest idea of how to write a comic book script, but one rainy afternoon, Bill Finger, the star comics writer of the time, took me in hand and gave me—a potential rival—an illuminating lecture on the craft. I still regard that as a high point in the generosity of one colleague to another."

Bester was soon profitably employed pounding out comic book scripts for DC's *Starman*, *Genius Jones* and *Star-Spangled Kid* features, as well as *Captain Marvel* for Fawcett Publications. Alfie eventually succeeded Finger as the primary writer of *Green Lantern* (where he recruited his former literary agent Julius Schwartz as his editor).

In the spring of 1944, Bester's actress wife Rolly (radio's original Lois Lane) helped him break into the more prestigious world of radio scriptwriting. "One day she told me that the radio show, *Nick Carter*, was looking for scripts. I took one of my best comic book stories, translated it into a radio script and it was accepted. Then my wife told me that a new show, *Charlie Chan*, was having script

problems. I did the same thing with the same result. By the end of the year I was the regular writer on those two shows and branching out to *The Shadow* and others. The comic book days were over, but the splendid training I received in visualization, attack, dialogue and economy stayed with me forever."

Like many of his fellow pulp and comic writers, Alfie often rewrote his earlier plots and sold them to new markets, especially during his first year in radio. Bester reworked his 1942 *Starman* script, "The Little Man Who Wasn't There," and his "The Man with the Missing Memory," Vandal Savage and "The Face of Death" *Green Lantern* stories during his early months as a *Shadow* writer.

Bester's *Shadow* scripts often featured strong psychological and scientific overtones: a psychotic madman fascinated with destruction sought fame through acts of terror in "The Destroyer," while a physician induced nightmares through subliminal ultrasonic transmissions in "The Man Who Dreamed Too Much."

While many of his *Shadow* scripts merely used the basic premise of earlier comic book scenarios, "The Lizard of Fire" radio script duplicates most of the plot elements of the comic book story with thinly disguised changes. The arsonist in *Green Lantern* #16 calls himself "The Lizard" and torches buildings with fiery metallic salamanders, while Lamont Cranston's foe



is "The Salamander" who utilizes flaming lizards.

"When the shift to television came, I went along with it, but rather reluctantly. Radio had been a tough, demanding craft, without room for fakers. Television was quite the opposite. It was around this time that I began writing science fiction again, solely for release from an entertainment medium which I disliked."

Bester's debut novel *The Demolished Man* was awarded the first Hugo Award at the 1953 World Science Fiction Convention, while *The Stars My Destination* (1957) is widely recognized as one of the all-time greatest science fiction novels. Bester bridged both traditional and new-wave science fiction, and in 1988 was posthumously awarded the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America's Grand Master Award. •



ARTIFICIAL INSOUCIANCE

Nic Farey

One of the perennial “joys” of driving a taxi is the almost inevitable sneering declaration from certain tecky types (especially during CES) that I’ll be out of a job anytime in the next 30 minutes because self-driving vehicles will be the *de rigeur* norm. We do in fact see a lot of so-called “autonomous vehicles” on the streets and properties of Las Vegas, since the company Aptiv has been testing here for months with their tecked-up BMWs, emblazoned with the company logo, proudly announcing their “self-driving” status, and indeed, having special tags (number plates, to non-US readers) confirming their designation as “autonomous vehicles”.

The impending takeover of AI on the roads is, of course, highly premature, despite the refrains of “I, for one, welcome our new four-wheeled masters” from the skiffily-blinded whiz kids. (Aside: “four-wheeled” may not necessarily be the case, since apparently at this year’s CES, BMW were showing off a concept self-driving *motorcycle* - what could possibly go wrong?)

Here are (some of) my counter-arguments:

- As a basic principle, autonomous vehicles aren’t going to be dominant, or even significantly effective, unless *all* vehicles are autonomous and the entire system is networked. It’s never going to be a mandate, even at state level, that vehicles must suddenly be autonomous ones overnight. No right-minded politician (if such a being exists) would attempt to persuade, say, some old git from Iowa that they must now give up their chugging yet still mostly reliable 1970s Chevy for an expensive new nannycar. The great majority of existing vehicles would have to be grandfathered in, and so it would be *many* years before autonomous vehicles would hold sway. I’d confidently predict the establishment of a group we might call the NUVA (National Unautomated Vehicle Association) which would immediately eclipse

the NRA in terms of political clout. The overarching point is that, ignoring any argument about how technologically feasible these vehicles might be, their widespread implementation isn't *politically* feasible at all.

- Observing the Aptiv test vehicles here which, incidentally, are partnered with Lyft and available for ride-hailing, they come with a “crew” of two: the human components are a driver and an observer/supervisor in the other front seat. City driving, especially in Las Vegas, provides a stiff test. Not only are the vehicles expected to navigate typical city traffic (though ours isn't nearly as bad as LA or DC, for example), they also have to properly drive through the various hotel properties, all of which have a (usually) one-way specific traffic pattern, designated pick-up and drop-off locations and, importantly (and this fucks up inexperienced Uber drivers in particular) are typically *not* navigable via GPS since they are not “public roads.” We see the Aptivs driving in and out of hotel properties (under human control), presumably to allow the system to learn the layouts. Even if the layouts are learned, the “system” would need to recognize signals and typical gestures and direction from on-property valets, security staff and the like, which are not uniform by any means. The human mind can interpret the variation with relative ease, AI not so much.
- Unless and until all vehicles are autonomous and networked, a human component is going to be required to intercede and override the AI in critical or unusual situations. While cross-country driving has less of a need for this (having driven from Maryland to Nevada, and later all over the shop for work, I'm aware that there are swaths of the country where you'd hardly see another vehicle for hours), city and town driving requires a constant alertness and frequent decision-making and anticipatory skills. The human component, therefore, operating in a mixed environment of autonomous and non-autonomous vehicles must remain as observant of the conditions *as if they were actually driving*. A terse analysis of that requirement might be “so what's the fucking point, then?”, but I'd add that it would seem clear that the reaction time of a human component who is not actually in control would exceed that of a human in constant control, and thus genuinely and consistently alert. (I realize that as a professional driver I'm likely to be better at this than your average schlub, but regular driving commuters would also have acquired skills.) Sure, long-haul cross-country driving could allow the driver to have a snooze (perhaps), but that just makes all that gee whiz teck little more than glorified cruise control.
- Autonomous vehicle AI is programmed to obey the rules of the road, of course. This turns out to be a distinct disadvantage probably just about everywhere except East Tennessee, the only place I've ever observed rule-keeping and courteous drivers. I had an interesting conversation with an engineer passenger, apparently familiar with the software, who told me that they had to make the AI more “aggressive” at four-way stops, where they ended up being paralyzed by other vehicles jumping the gun, as impatient humans will tend to do. I've had the dubious privilege myself of being mired behind an Aptiv car at the left-turn signal at Koval Lane and Flamingo Road, where it took three cycles of the light to decide that it might be all right to actually go. And inevitably, where the speed limit on any given stretch is (say) 35, the human driver knows that if you hold that speed you're gonna get run over and/or traditionally gestured at, whereas the AI wants to be sanctimoniously law-abiding. This again shows how a mix of AI and human-operated vehicles won't be ideal.

The philosophical considerations of all this encompass a surprisingly broad spectrum. It would certainly appeal to leftist nannyism, and yet someone with a powerpoint app and too much time on their hands could no doubt trace the erosion of individual liberty in vehicular matters from the **mandating of seatbelts onward. Headlights? We don't need no steenkin' headlights...**

Nannyism has an inherent belief that “this is for your own good”, and despite hard evidence that e.g. the seatbelt requirement has significantly reduced fatalities and serious injury in auto accidents, the libertarian view would argue that it's up to the individual, and that *any* such restrictions on behavior are unwelcome. The problem with those extremes of viewpoint come down to the observation that while nannyism assumes that people are too thick to be able to take care of

themselves, the libertarian viewpoint is that people ought to be allowed to make their own unfettered decisions. The latter is reasonable *if* it's deemed that people are sufficiently well-informed to make such decisions in their own self-interest, and the former has evidence to back up the fact that, yes, there are an abundance of fuckin' stupid people who in one philosophy need to be protected from themselves, and in the other should actually be allowed to die from ignorance, with the fervent hope that they don't take anyone else with them.

And now, Guy, you will apply all these arguments to gun control in a future *Spartacus*, won't you? (Have at it!)

Dear Guy,
I would like to submit the following poem/song
This poem is called writer to writer
It's about a husband and wife lost in time
They try to find each other again.
The word trambeling is not a typo it's a word I invented
It means sojourning in a world of hell.

MICHELLE BONNELL

Writer to Writer

Last night the rain was Dark
Like a torrents covering
trambeling through a lost city
Making me wonder if we go on.
There's no one there
Only the creatures of the night
I am wondering if you're alright
but you're so far away
I can't feel your heart
I try to believe you're there
Somewhere in the dark
But I know you're gone
I feel you're there
Somewhere in the dark
But I know you're gone
I feel your distant cry
A cry that only exists
in a time that does not exist

In a place only my heart knows is true
I believe in you
And writer to writer
Were both lost in the dark
Trying so hard to find the light
Knowing it's not real
And only the creatures of the night grab my hand
Taunting and haunting
Telling me That you're not there in the dark

And there is no light
And all that is real
is this believing in my heart
That you exist

WRITER TO WRITER

And living in different dimensions
Of time and place unable to make contact they write
To each other, in a world of hell and creatures
Are you there in the dark

Are you reaching for my hand
The dark rain pours down
It fills the city
And melts the path in front of me
All I can see is the darkness
And believing in my heart that you exist
And you're there in the dark
Reaching out to me in the darkness of the night
Trying to reach for my hand
The creatures of the night
they take my hand
Taunting and haunting that you're not there
They tell me you're not there
And all I have is this believing in my heart
That you exist
Please tell me again
Tell me you exist
Reach for my hand

make me believe
you exist
Trying to resist the rain
Filling me with pain of the darkness
And evil in the night
Knowing and believing that you exist
I believe In you
I believe in you
The creatures they scream in the night And rip at my
clothes
And they tear the night apart with rapturing claws
And all that I have is this knowing THAT you exist

Please tell me again that you exist
Writer to writer
Tell me you exist

Sincerely,
Athena Alexa

The Challenger Musical Theatre Survey

by *Mike Resnick*

Rich Lynch had an article in the last issue of *Challenger*, recounting how he was on a panel on musical theatre at the 2012 Worldcon, and how strenuously he disagreed with two of the panelists – Laura Frankos and myself – when at the end we were asked to name the **best musical we'd ever seen**.

Well, **we three aren't the only ones who** enjoy the musical theatre, so I thought it might be interesting to run a little survey on the best musicals, and the single best acting jobs in same.

We'll begin with Laura Frankos, who not only writes science fiction and raises a new generation of Turtledove writers with husband Harry, but also is the author of the delightful *The Broadway Musical Quiz Book*:

- 1 – Sweeney Todd
- 2 – Follies
- 3 – Sunday in the Park With George
- 4 – 1776
- 5 – She Loves Me
- 6 – A Little Night Music
- 7 – City of Angels
- 8 – Gypsy
- 9 – My Fair Lady
- 10 – Porgy and Bess
- 11 – Kiss Me Kate
- 12 – The Music Man

Best Performance by a Male: William Daniels in “1776”

Best Performance by a Female: Ethel Merman in “Gypsy”

Then **there's our publisher**, 14-time Hugo nominee Guy H. Lillian III, who is clearly



interested in the musical theater or he wouldn't have okayed this survey. Guy's choices are:

- 1 – Les Miserables
- 2 – Sweeney Todd
- 3 – How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying
- 4 – Marat/Sade
- 5 – Hair
- 6 – Phantom of the Opera
- 7 – Rent
- 8 – Oliver!
- 9 – Porgy and Bess
- 10 – 42nd Street
- 11 – Pippin
- 12 – A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum
- 13 – The Rocky Horror [Picture] Show

Runners-up – **L'il Abner**, Show Boat

Male: George Hearn in “Sweeney Todd”

Female: Angela Lansbury in “Sweeney Todd”

Peter Filichia is just about my favorite writer on the subject of Broadway musicals. A professional critic and columnist, he also has a number of books out on the subject: *Broadway Musicals: The Biggest Hit and the Biggest Flop of the Season, 1959-2009*; *Let's Put on a Musical*; *Strippers, Showgirls, and Sharks*; and *Broadway Musical MVPs – 1960-2010*.

Peter's choices:

- 1 – Porgy and Bess
- 2 – A Chorus Line
- 3 – 1776
- 4 – My Fair Lady
- 5 – Follies
- 6 – Fiddler on the Roof
- 7 – Cabaret
- 8 – Les Miserables
- 9 – Carousel
- 10 – A Little Night Music
- 11 – Grand Hotel
- 12 – Ragtime

Male: William Daniels in “1776”
 Female: Liza Minnelli in “Chicago”

Can't overlook Rich

Lynch, the reason for this survey. Rich and wife Nikki have won 5 Hugos for their fanzine *Mimosa*, and continue to be active in fandom:

- 1 – Anything Goes
- 2 – Man of La Mancha
- 3 – South Pacific
- 4 – Guys and Dolls
- 5 – A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum
- 6 – Kiss Me Kate
- 7 – La Cage Aux Folles
- 8 – Chicago
- 9 – **A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder**
- 10 – How To Succeed in Business Without Really Trying
- 11 – Camelot
- 12 – On the Town

Male: Bruce Dow in “A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum”

Female: Sutton Foster in “Anything Goes”

Long-time fan Leah Zeldes actually did some theatre reviewing for some suburban Chicago papers (and was on that panel with Rich, Laura and me):

- 1 – Chicago
- 2 – Sweeney Todd
- 3 – Urinetown
- 4 – The Rocky Horror Show
- 5 – Little Shop of Horrors
- 6 – Hair
- 7 – Guys and Dolls
- 8 – The Fantasticks

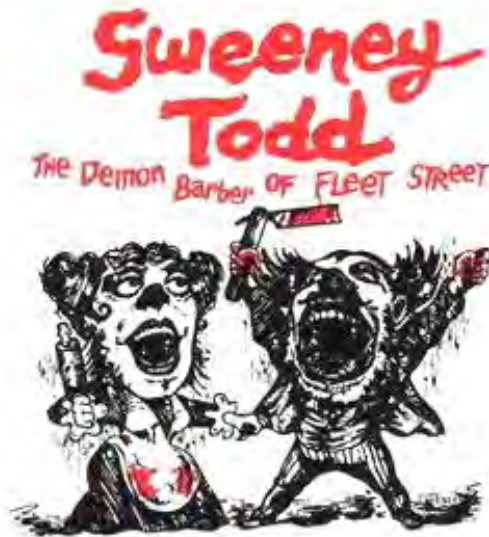
- 9 – Lizard Music
- 10 – Cabaret
- 11 – La Luna Muda
- 12 – The Frogs

Male: Kingsley Day in “The Mikado”

Female: Barbara Robertson in “Yeast Nation”

Barry Malzberg, a lifetime NYC-area resident, is the author of more than 90 books and 400 stories, winner of the very first Campbell Memorial Award, and a multiple Hugo and Nebula nominee. Barry named his best play, and listed 11 more but declined to rank them:

- 1 – Sweeney Todd
 - 2 – Follies
 - 3 – Pacific Overtures
 - 4 – A Little Night Music
 - 5 – A Chorus Line
 - 6 – Me and Juliet
 - 7 – The Most Happy Fella
 - 8 – Sunday in the Park
With George
 - 9 – My Fair Lady
 - 10 – Camelot
 - 11 – Brigadoon
 - 12 – The Music Man
- Male: Len Cariou in “Sweeney Todd”
 Female: Barbara Streisand in “Funny Girl”



Steven H. Silver is a devoted musical fan. In real life, he publishes *Argentus*, has sold some fiction and even more non-fiction, has run some Windycons, and is active in SFWA.

Steven's choices:

- 1 – Guys and Dolls
- 2 – **A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder**
- 3 – A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum
- 4 – Something Rotten
- 5 – 1776
- 6 – Chess
- 7 – First Date
- 8 – The Threepenny Opera
- 9 – The Boys From Syracuse
- 10 – Hero
- 11 – How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying
- 12 – Kiss Me Kate

Male: Chaim Topol in “Fiddler on the Roof”

Female: Sara Ramirez in “Spamalot”

Craig Miller chaired the 1984 Worldcon in Los Angeles. Professionally he promoted *Star Wars* and others for Lucasfilms in the 1970s and 1980s, and more recently has teamed with Marv Wolfman to form Wolfmill

Entertainment. Craig's choices:

- 1 – Guys and Dolls
- 2 – The Music Man
- 3 – Little Shop of Horrors
- 4 – 42nd Street
- 5 – Cats
- 6 – La Cage Aux Folles
- 7 – The King and I
- 8 – **How** to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying
- 9 – Oliver
- 10 – Pippin
- 11 – Sweeney Todd
- 12 – **A Funny** Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum

Male: Tommy Tune in “My One and Only”

Female: Angela Lansbury in “Sweeney Todd”

And then there's me.

Professionally I've sold

76 novels, 10 other books, 284 stories, and 3 screenplays, and am the all-time leading award winner for short fiction. More to the point, I am a musical theatre fanatic. When I was at the University of Chicago (1959-1961) I used to drive or hitch-hike to Manhattan every month or two, to check out bookstores by day and musicals at night, which means I got to see the original casts in such long-ago classics as “Fiorello!”, “Take Me Along”, “Gypsy”, and “The Sound of Music”. (And even before that, I sneaked up while in high school to catch “The Music Man”, “Flower Drum Song”, “West Side Story”, and “The Threepenny Opera”.) Then, when I was **breaking in as a writer, I'd go up to Manhattan** every couple of months looking for assignments, and managed to see a play every night. And I still go at every opportunity, as well as checking out road companies where I live and picking up DVDs of every show that *has* a DVD.



OK, my choices:

- 1 – Sweeney Todd
- 2 – Falsettos
- 3 – **Grover's Corners**
- 4 – City of Angels
- 5 – The Fantasticks
- 6 – Amour
- 7 – **Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death**
- 8 – 1776
- 9 – The Last 5 Years
- 10 – Man of La Mancha
- 11 – Pacific Overtures
- 12 – Follies

Male: Richard Kiley in “Man of La Mancha”

Female: Inga Swenson in “110 in the Shade”

And since I'm in charge of this article, I thought I'd list my runners-up in alphabetical (not numerical) order:

A Little Night Music
 Baker Street
 Carnival
 Company
 Fiorello!
 Guys and Dolls
 110 in the Shade
 Portrait of Jennie
 Sunday in the Park with George
 Take Me Along
 The Threepenny Opera
 West Side Story
 And my runner-up performances:
 Male: Robert Morse in “How to Succeed in Business”
 George Hearn in “Sweeney Todd”
 William Daniels in “1776”

Female: Ethel Merman in “Gypsy”

Angela Lansbury in “Sweeney Todd”

Lotte Lenya in “The Threepenny Opera”

I didn't ask about supporting roles, but **just for the record the two best I've ever seen** were Robert Morse, barely out of his teens, stealing “Take Me Along” from Jackie Gleason and Walter Pidgeon; and Chip Zien as the shrink in “Falsettos”.

I didn't ask for favorite composers either, but mine are Stephen Sondheim, the team of Tom Jones & Harvey Schmidt, William Finn, and Michel LeGrand, in that order. (Though sometimes I reverse the top two.)

Stage sets and costumes? Nah, we'll do that in some other survey.

Keeping with the issue's robot theme, see **Brad Foster's** portrait of our man Resnick below. He's been ill of late. Get well, Mike: your orchestra seat awaits you!



“goes to that place where dreams are born.” But it’s a pitiful triumph. Love is a transitory illusion and only illusion brings happiness.

Here is the film’s fundamental failure. The moral question of responsibility asked at the outset of unanswered. *A.I.* deals only with the needful part of love. It doesn’t touch at all on giving it. The Wizard of Oz tells the Tin Man – David’s figurative ancestor – that the measure of lives is not how much they love, but how much they are loved in return. I’ve always thought a distorted point of view. Someone asks in the film, “Didn’t God make Adam to love Him?” I’d say Yes – but I don’t read the sentence the way the script does. God created Adam not so He would someone to give Him love, but so He would have someone on whom to bestow love. Being loved isn’t the whole point. Giving love is just as big a need.

Everyone in *A.I.* needs love. Who gives it? William Hurt’s doctor creates David, his “mother” programs David, to love them. David’s search is for someone who will love him. Who teaches David that the point of life is not to gather love like money in an account – but to spend it? The only way to know love is to bestow it. The empty heart in the mobile is filled not from without, but from within. I don’t think David ever learns that. I don’t think *A.I.*, for all its admirable ambition, has that lesson to teach.



A.I. Cont. from p. 20

Love becomes, at *A.I.*’s wistful ending, what it was in the beginning, the empty heart in the mobile, the empty arms of the child left on the side of the road, a universal need, the call of one being – orca or mecha – for another. And if love resists the movie’s attempts to explain it, if it must remain part of “the inner world of dreams,” then so be it, and David’s day of perfect love ends therefore with triumph, as he



Something strange is happening
in the town of Stepford.

Where the men spend their nights doing something secret.
And every woman acts like every man's dream of the
"perfect" wife.

Where a young woman watches the
dream become a nightmare.

And sees the nightmare engulf her best friend.

And realizes that any moment, any second—
her turn is coming.



THE STEPFORD WIVES

A very modern suspense story from the author of Rosemary's Baby.

COLUMBIA PICTURES and PALOMAR PICTURES INTERNATIONAL Presents THE STEPFORD WIVES.
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and Conducted by MICHAEL SMALL. Executive Producer GUSTAVE BERNE. Produced by EDGAR J. SCHERICK.
Directed by BRYAN FORBES. A Fadsin Cinema Associates Production.

PG PARENTAL GUIDANCE SUGGESTED
Some material may not be suitable for pre-teens

The Stepford Identity: The Story behind *The Stepford Wives*

Jim Ivers

It came as a shock when I recently learned that *The Stepford Wives*, Ira Levin's twice-filmed 1972 novel, was inspired by my home town of Wilton, Connecticut. Not having read the book, I had always assumed Stepford was based on the more fashionable and ritzy Westport (where the 1975 film adaptation was partly shot) or the absurdly wealthy New Canaan with its stately Victorian manors of brick and stone and fabulous mid-century modern homes (including Phillip Johnson's famous Glass House). Both towns are contiguous with Wilton and have inspired numerous works of fiction about life in upscale suburbia.

Shortly before his death in 2007, Levin revealed in a letter to *The New York Times* that Stepford was based on Wilton. He also stated that the nearby city of Stamford -- a "step" away from Wilton -- is where the name Stepford came from. Levin was a long-time New Yorker who lived in Wilton between 1966 and 1970. Most likely he moved to this quiet, woodsy region to work on *Rosemary's Baby*, his best-selling novel published in 1967. The Levins resided at 200 Danbury Road (at the intersection of Sharp Hill Road) and 715 Ridgefield Road (at Vista). Despite the satirical message at the heart of *The Stepford Wives*, Levin insisted in his letter that Wilton "was very nice, and we enjoyed it, and the women were not Stepford wives ... This was just my imagination at work."

The Novel

The partly autobiographical story concerns the Eberharts, a young family that moves from

Manhattan to the quaint, leafy village of Stepford. Despite its charming exterior, Joanna Eberhart finds an insular, unsocial community full of highly home-oriented women with no outside interests. Walter, her workaholic husband, becomes increasingly distant, spending his evenings at a mysterious Men's Association. This secretive group consists of cutting-edge scientists and engineers who work for various high-tech corporations clumped together on the same street. The leader of the Association, we are told, created the animatronic robots at Disneyland's talking presidents exhibit. And this technology is being developed to make perfect, look-alike robots to replace their wives.

A bit of foreshadowing occurs when Joanna observes a Christmas nativity display in the town center. The stable scene with Mary and Joseph, the infant Jesus in the manger, lambs, and calves are described as "Very lifelike ... though a mite Disneyish." This was no doubt inspired by the annual creche that was set up on the grassy strip in front of the Piersall building in Wilton Center for 40-plus years. That spot is now a war memorial site with commemorative plaques and stone monuments. The nativity creche was subsequently moved to the Town Green in front of the old Center School (where I attended kindergarten back in the 60s).

Joanna makes friends with recent arrival Bobbie Markowe. Bobbie is from Ajax County - an obvious allusion to the popular brand of cleaning products. She is described as being short and a bit plump with dark tufty hair. And, as the only Jew in Waspy Stepford, she is even more of an outsider than Joanna. Together they befriend glamorous Charmaine Wimperis, a wealthy but unhappy trophy wife.

Inspired by the Women's Liberation movement, the trio organizes a women's discussion group, but the other wives show little interest. They are all docile, zombie-like beings obsessed with housework. Joanna sees them as "actresses in commercials, pleased with detergents and floor wax, with cleansers, shampoos, and deodorants. Pretty actresses, big in the bosom but small in the talent, playing suburban housewives unconvincingly, too nicey-nice to be real."

After Charmaine and Bobbie are replaced by mechanical doppelgangers, Joanna finally discovers that the Men's Association is a conspiracy designed to replace the women of Stepford with look-alike, but more voluptuous, robots that mimic the stereotypical housewives portrayed in advertisements. The basic idea for the mechanical women came from "The Cyborgs Among Us" section from Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* (1970), which also describes Disneyland's computer-controlled humanoids and the future of artificial intelligence.

The narrative also parallels the paranoia-charged *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), a science fiction film in which humans are replaced by emotionless alien duplicates. The appellation "Stepford wife" eventually became a derogatory term for a submissive spouse who finds contentment in the role of a traditional, old-fashioned homemaker.

The Wilton Correlation

My second shock came after finding a copy of Levin's book, a slender volume of only 123 pages, at my local library in Milford. For some reason I expected to find a rich, literary novel full of perceptive metaphors and poetic descriptions comparable to fellow suburban wordsmiths such as Updike and Cheever. Instead, Levin turned out to be a supreme master of minimalism. (He makes Hemmingway look long-winded and rambling by comparison.) Levin's rigorously disciplined prose is stripped of anything extraneous or ornamental. His sentences are engineered with the tightness and precision of a Swiss watch. And yet, he manages to provide just enough detail so that one never feels deprived. To create this impression of fullness with such austere, economic prose is a remarkable accomplishment in itself.

I was happy to discover the book delivered on the promise of recognizable locations and references. Wilton, as we know, is surrounded by Ridgefield, Westport, Norwalk, and New Canaan. This corresponds with the fictional towns of Sheffield, Eastbridge, Norwood, and New Sharon, respectively. Route Seven has been changed to Route Nine. Joanna drives

north to Sheffield (Ridgefield) to see a psychiatrist. Her doctor describes the town. "A few artists and writers came here to Sheffield a long time ago, others followed, and people who found them too Bohemian moved away. Now we're an artists-and-writers town; not exclusively, of course, but enough to make us different from Norwood and Kimball." Kimball may be a reference to nearby Trumbull.

Stepford Center is nearly identical to Wilton Center. The row of "white frame Colonial shopfronts, postcard pretty" with its luncheonette describes the Barringer building, which looks the same to this day. He mentions the old post office, Center Pharmacy, hardware store, the Center Market (Village Market), and the "white frame library" with clapboard siding across the street. Before being replaced by a large modern facility in 1975, the original library was a quaint, house-like 1918 structure with a large stone fireplace and a creaky wood floor. The library is important to the story as Joanna goes into its basement archives to look up old newspaper records about the town. The novel also mentions the Historical Society's "two-hundred-year-old white frame cottage" (the Lambert house).

Just up the hill from the Center is the ominous Men's Association building -- based in "the old Terhune place" which emits an odd medicinal smell. The location roughly matches the Old Town Hall (c. 1832) and parish house across the street from the picturesque Congregational Church (which is not mentioned in the book).

On Route Nine, past the shopping mall and antique stores, is a row of industrial plants Bobbie calls "Poisoner's Row". These "neat low modern buildings, set back from the road and separated each from the next by wide spans of green lawn," are the fictional corporations Ulitz Optics, CompuTech, Stevenson Biochemical, Haig-Darling Computers, Burnham-Massey-Microtech, Instatron, Versey Electronics, and AmeriChem Willis. This is the source of the robot technology the Men's Association has been developing. It's never made clear if this is a secret after-hours project or if the companies are part of a larger conspiracy.

On Route Seven in Wilton, this matches the location and description of one large company, Perkin-Elmer. I'm familiar with the place as my father worked there for over 20 years. Perkin-Elmer developed a variety of leading-edge

technologies including the optical components for the Hubble Space Telescope and spy satellites for the government. I'd like to think they also dabbled in a few prototype fembot models on the side.

There is brief mention of "Picnic grounds where a community park was being constructed." This corresponds with Merwin Meadows Park, adjacent to the town center, which was being developed in 1969.

Joanna drives south on Route Nine to a new mall -- most likely the shopping center where Caldor (now a Walmart) once stood -- then "east on Eastbridge Road to a MacDonald's." This appears to be West Rocks Road following a strangely circuitous route to the then-new McDonalds in Norwalk.

The book mentions many fictional streets with familiar-sounding names such as Fairview (Fairview Lane?), where the Eberharts live, Burgess Ridge (Sturgess Ridge Road?), Short Ridge Hill (Sharp Hill Road?), Fox Hollow Lane (Fox Run?), Pine Tree Lane, Hickory Lane, Old Norwood Road, et al. Charmaine Wimperis -- described as resembling Raquel Welch -- lives on Burgess Ridge in a lavish "two-hundred-thousand-dollar contemporary" with a tennis court. Back then, you could build a grand home for half that much. Joanna also mentions shopping for a nice house in the \$53,000 range.

The town paper, *The Stepford Chronicle*, mirrors *The Wilton Bulletin*. One incident that amused me had the Eberharts driving to Eastbridge (Westport) and later Norwood (Norwalk) to dine at a fancy French restaurant



and take in an R-rated movie. Until the late 1990s Wilton had just one movie house, the notoriously conservative Wilton Cinema (now a T.J. Maxx) in the Gateway Shopping Center. For some reason, the theater only screened PG-rated

family films and Disney features. (Perhaps the proprietors didn't want to attract riff-raff from out of town.) Consequently, anyone seeking more sophisticated fare had to patronize the Fine Arts theaters in Westport or go "slumming" in downtown Norwalk. And, until fairly recently, Wilton was a dry town with no full-service restaurants, just a few teen hangouts -- Friendly's, before its yuppie makeover, and John's Best Pizza. It was a much quieter town back then.

Stepford on the Big Screen

William Goldman, a highly respected novelist and screenwriter, was selected to write the screenplay for the film. His most noteworthy script up to that point was for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969), co-starring Katharine Ross, who would go on to play the Joanna Eberhart role. Goldman altered story and character elements to fit his interpretation of the novel. He turned the mechanical wives into more overtly sexy fashion-model types clad in provocative outfits. He also dropped Levin's chillingly subtle, understated finale in favor of a gruesome climax more in line with a standard horror film.

Goldman left the project after director Bryan Forbes rejected his changes and penned his own uncredited rewrite. Forbes cast his wife, Nanette Newman, as Carol van Sant, the Eberhart's neighbor. He also put the wives in quaint, floor-length dresses and frilly aprons which gave them a more artificial, doll-like appearance. (Levin expressed disappointment over the costume changes.) He also wrote a new opening sequence with the Eberharts

leaving their Manhattan apartment and driving to Stepford in a station wagon. This includes a touch of foreshadowing with Joanna (a semi-professional photographer) taking photographs of a man carrying a nude female mannequin across the street.

The casting for Joanna and Bobbie tried to replicate the chemistry between Mary Tyler Moore and Valerie Harper on *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970-77). Katharine Ross was cast as Joanna after Diane Keaton turned down the role. The vivacious Paula Prentiss stands out as the fun, outspoken Bobbie. The tall, lanky actress makes the role her own. She introduces herself as “Bobbie Markowe, that’s upward mobility for Markowitz,” the only reference to her character being Jewish. Tina Louise is also effective as the somewhat jaded Charmaine Wimperis, resigned to a loveless marriage to a wealthy television executive.

Early on, we see Carol van Sant in her long pink smock, sun hat, and white gloves pruning ornamental bushes with shears. This may have inspired a scene from *American Beauty* (1999) which introduces Annette Bening’s cold, reserved housewife character; she uses color-coordinated shears that match her gardening ensemble. A similar sequence introduces Stepford-esque Bree Van De Kamp (Marcia Cross) in the pilot episode of the popular suburban soap opera *Desperate Housewives* (2004-2012).

Forbes added several key scenes featuring Carol van Sant. After a minor parking lot accident, she becomes confused, mechanically repeating the same phrase. Joanna notices the ambulance taking her away isn’t going toward the hospital. Later, Joanna and Bobbie attend a fancy backyard party thrown by the quietly sinister Dale Gribble (Patrick O’Neal), head of the Men’s Association. Here Carol has a more serious malfunction as the accident has created a glitch in her programming. She wanders around in her flouncy, ankle-length dress repeatedly saying “I’ll just die if I don’t get this recipe” before her husband and Gribble whisk her away. His elegant house with its terraced gardens and large swimming pool could be from 1968’s suburban drama *The Swimmer* (more on that later).

Taking a page directly from the book, an amusing bit of satire occurs at the first and only meeting of the ill-fated women’s group. Joanna, Bobbie, and Charmaine try to initiate a frank “consciousness-raising” discussion on women’s issues (or “bitching session” as Charmaine calls it). Things take a surreal, comedic turn as the robotic wives collectively rhapsodize over the efficacy of a cleaning product, sounding exactly like actresses in a TV commercial.

Later in the story, after Charmaine and Bobbie have been replaced by cleaning-obsessed fembots attired in conservative apron-dresses, Joanna visits a psychiatrist who suggests moving to Westport (“a place for artists and writers”). Fairfield County and the fictional Eastbridge are also briefly mentioned.

Unlike the book, the film’s climax occurs at the **Men’s Association on a stormy summer night**. Joanna frantically searches for her children inside the dark, spooky Victorian mansion. On the second floor she encounters her replacement, a soulless double with eerie black eyes and a menacing smirk. In the hazy, dream-like denouement (which does match the book), the wives, looking like Southern belles in long sundresses and wide-brimmed hats, serenely float down the aisles at the supermarket exchanging mild pleasantries. The final image is of the new Joanna walking toward us, her face a mask of blank contentment.

Practical Locations

The opening scenes were filmed on the streets of Manhattan. The rest of the movie was shot on practical locations (no sets were built) in southern Connecticut during the summer of 1974; the film was released in February 1975. Bryan Forbes and others rented houses in Westport during production and filmed a few scenes around town. The Eberhart home, a traditional white colonial with black shutters, was in Fairfield. The Grand Union supermarket and other shops were part of the ironically-named Goodwives Shopping Center in neighboring Darien. (A friend of ours was working as a cashier at the market and appears

briefly as an extra.) The exterior of the therapist's office was in Weston.

The Men's Association was housed in the castle-like Lockwood-Mathews Mansion in Norwalk. This classic 1868 example of Second Empire country house design provided the perfect atmospheric setting for the film's eerie finale. The mansion also appears in the 1970 film *House of Dark Shadows*, based on the popular TV series.

Westport, New Canaan and Wilton

Despite its connection to Ira Levin's novel, Wilton remains in relative obscurity while the surrounding towns keep turning up in books, films, and television shows. Wilton has always been overshadowed by the better-known and more affluent Westport, home of actors, writers, and other celebrities. Since the mid-1950s Westport has been the exemplar of the classic suburban New England town.

Norwalk native Sloan Wilson set his best-selling novel, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955), in Westport. The story has a few thematic links to *The Stepford Wives*, albeit from a different perspective. Tom Rath and his family live in a dumpy house on an unfashionable street where "contentment was an object of contempt." He takes the commuter train to New York each day where he strives to succeed in the world of big business while struggling to maintain his integrity. (Rath's ever-supportive wife Betty is like a prototype of the Stepford ideal.) The novel's title also became part of the American vernacular, representing corporate conformity. The glossy 1956 film version starring Gregory Peck was also partly filmed in Westport.

Rod Serling moved to Westport in 1953 and commuted to New York on the same Metro-North train line. Like Tom Rath, he rejected the creeping complacency of the gray flannel

crowd. Serling's break-out teleplay was *Patterns*, a scathing expose on big-business ethics and ambition (made into a feature film in 1956). His daily train trips also inspired one of his best *Twilight Zone* episodes, "A Stop at Willoughby" (1960). A stressed-out executive nods off on the train each night on the way home to Westport (we even hear the conductor call out the stop) and dreams of Willoughby, a serene, idyllic village that exists in the 1900s.

Westport was also the fictional home of Darrin and Samantha Stephens on the popular television sitcom *Bewitched* (1964–1972). Director Frank Perry used his home town of Westport for the filming of *The Swimmer* (1968), a lyrical, surreal odyssey across the elegant lawns and sparkling pools of upper-class suburbia. Adapted from the enigmatic John Cheever story, the beautifully-filmed narrative also serves as an exclusive house-and-garden tour, unintentionally documenting a unique place and time.

Going for a more extreme effect, Wes Craven chose rural parts

of Westport to film the controversial horror-shocker *The Last House on the Left* (1972). The natural beauty of the location contrasts with the violence and ugliness inherent in this nightmarish abduction/home-invasion tale.

More recently, the ABC sitcom *American Housewife* concerns a flawed family that moves to Westport and struggles to keep up appearances with their snooty, Stepford-like neighbors. (A Hollywood production that looks nothing like the actual town.)

And then there's Martha Stewart, homemaker supreme and the closest thing to a real-world Stepford wife. (Ever notice how she never ages?) In her heyday, she produced her popular TV series *Martha Stewart Living* (1993-2005) from her picture-perfect estate in (where else?) Westport.

For tragic stories about moral decay and the decline of family values in upper-class



suburbia, New Canaan, not Wilton, is often the town of choice. *The Ice Storm*, Rick Moody's disturbing 1994 novel, is set in New Canaan and uses real street names and locations. Ang Lee's acclaimed 1997 feature film based on the book was also shot in town. This sensitive and perceptive film captures the beauty and isolation of this exclusive, densely wooded enclave.

If that wasn't depressing enough, there's plenty of hopeless despair to go around in *Revolutionary Road* (1961), the Richard Yates novel set in 1955 New Canaan. The 2008 Leonardo DiCaprio/Kate Winslet film treatment was partly shot in Darien.

Far from Heaven (2002) is perhaps the best, and least miserable, revisionist take on 1950s suburban Connecticut (despite being filmed in New Jersey). This finely-crafted work is an homage to the glossy style and social commentary of director Douglas Sirk's films. It stars Julianne Moore, Dennis Quaid, and Dennis Haysbert.

Finally, the only movie filmed in Wilton worth mentioning is *Rachel, Rachel* (1968), starring Joanne Woodward and directed by husband Paul Newman (Westport's most famous long-term residents). Set in a fictional Connecticut village, the sensitive story concerns a lonely schoolteacher at a crossroads in her life. Several key scenes were filmed in and around a small colonial-style funeral home on West Church Street. This is one block north of the old Gilbert & Bennett School – I was a student there in the third grade at the time. A friend and classmate who lived next to the funeral home appears as an extra (playing dead on an embalming table).

The Stepford Legacy

The original *Stepford* movie was followed by three disposable made-for-TV sequels, *Revenge of the Stepford Wives* (1980), *The Stepford Children* (1987), and *The Stepford Husbands* (1996). The latter turned the women into the oppressors. All three were made in California and produced by Edgar J. Scherick, producer of the 1975 film. More recently, there

have been a few mediocre attempts at turning the book into a TV series.

The Stepford Wives (2004) feature film remake (or re-imagining) is a dark comedy that satirizes contemporary issues. Paul Rudnick's screenplay discarded everything but the basic concept and changed the story and characters to suit his personal taste. Joanna Eberhart (Nicole Kidman) is turned into a cold, almost bitchy TV producer of man-hating programs such as *I Can Do Better*, a *Survival*-inspired reality series where wives can dump her husbands. After getting fired by her network, Joanna and her family leave New York and move to Stepford.

The town has been upgraded to an exclusive gated community full of absurdly large, grotesquely ostentatious mansions. These lavishly over-decorated homes look like a Martha Stewart fever-dream. There's no mention of feminist issues, no jokes about advertising, and next to nothing about wives being obsessed with housework. The women's meeting from the previous incarnations is changed to the wives swooning over a fancy gift catalog. Here the satire is directed at the excessive, designer-dominated materialism of the super-rich. Rudnick's reboot, which jettisons the middle-class setting of the original story, reeks of Hollywood elitism and might as well be set in Beverly Hills or Bel Air. This gravitational pull toward southern California is enhanced by a glittery cast featuring Nicole Kidman, Christopher Walken, Glenn Close, Bette Midler, and Matthew Broderick.

Instead of robot replacements, the wives are “perfected” by plastic surgery and microchips implanted in their brains. The technology is said to come from Microsoft, AOL (a reference that dates the film) and other hi-tech companies. However, robots are also randomly mixed in, which creates some confusion. One wife, after having a bank card put in her mouth, spits out cash like an ATM machine -- a comedic bit which makes no sense in the context of the story. Joanna sees a bald mannequin-like duplicate of herself, one of the male characters turns out to be a robot, and a wacky deleted scene has Bobbie (Bette Midler) in full Jetsons-like robot mode with arms that turn into appliances.

This retelling flips the original story on its head. The wives, we are told, are all brilliant over-achievers with weak, insecure husbands. The men are all Bill Gates-type techno-nerds who feel so emasculated and inadequate that they turn their spouses into passive robots. Since this new premise has no place for trophy wife Charmaine Wimperis, she's replaced by a flamboyant gay man (played by Norwalk native Roger Bart) who provides snarky, comic relief remarks.

The Men's Association leader Dale Coba is changed to Mike Wellington (Christopher Walken). His wife Claire (Greenwich native Glenn Close), a new character, is an obvious Martha Stewart parody. More importantly, she (spoiler alert) turns out to be the behind-the-scenes leader of the entire operation (a brain surgeon and genetic engineer, no less). Her motivation for all of this is a longing for an old-fashioned world of elegance and romance, a bygone era of "tuxedos and chiffon gowns". In the end, the wives are set free after their brain chips are deactivated and the husbands are reduced to pathetic, henpecked slaves. Despite the efforts of a good director (Frank Oz) and an all-star cast, hilarity fails to ensue. Not surprisingly, this unfunny campy comedy with its understated gay subtext appealed to no one and flopped hard at the box-office.

As for locations, this was mostly filmed in Greenwich with glimpses of the Merritt Parkway and parts of Darien and New Canaan. In a nice bit of continuity, the Mathews Mansion was used once again for the Men's Association. There are more exterior shots of the elegant old house and some key scenes filmed inside the rotunda that deliberately match the composition and camera angles seen in the 1975 film.

There are at least two cases where the original *Stepford Wives* movie has had a positive influence on film and television. One of the best episodes of the Fox TV series *Married with Children*, "The Stepford Peg" (1997), puts an amusing spin on the old sitcom amnesia trope. Slovenly Peggy Bundy (Katey Sagal) loses her memories after hitting her head and starts dressing and behaving like an idealized

1950s housewife, constantly cooking, cleaning, etc.

Get Out (2017) is a brilliant little horror chiller with a clever, satirical edge. Filmed in Alabama, the story takes place at a wealthy home tucked away in a secluded, thickly forested area. Writer and first-time director Jordan Peele was admittedly inspired by *The Stepford Wives* and gave the familiar premise an original and satisfying twist. A surprise critical and box-office hit, the low-budget film picked up an Oscar for Best Original Screenplay.

Mixed Messages

Ira Levin's novel mocked the old-school sexism of the Hugh Hefner generation by taking it to an absurd extreme. The sinister Men's Association is a high-tech think tank that creates the Playmate-perfect spouse, a superficially attractive automaton with an eerie, doll-like emptiness. The open-ended story implies that one day the factory-produced wife could become another standard commodity like so many household products, frozen dinners, etc.

Levin has a such a light touch, and leaves so many gaps for the reader to fill in, that it's easy to overlook the broad volley directed at Madison Avenue. His mechanical homemakers are a parody of the condescending housewife stereotype that was the cornerstone of advertising from the '30s to the '80s, if not later.

The one-dimensional image of the dutiful, vacuous housewife mesmerized by consumer goods has been refined and reworked countless times (much like a Stepford robot) through market research and monitoring cultural and social change. In recent years ad agencies have been pandering to the dictates of political correctness (the enemy of so-called "toxic masculinity", traditional gender roles, etc.), resulting in a bizarre gender inversion. Specifically, the many TV commercials pushing the idealized image of the invincible, take-charge soccer mom who has it all – including a docile, buffoonish Stepford husband. This anti-male agenda makes the dreadful 2004 movie

seem almost prophetic. This strange trend, however, may be reaching the saturation point.

The Rip Van Winkle Effect

Much like advertising, Wilton has also shifted its priorities and changed in character and composition over time. Every other year or so I stop by Hillside Cemetery where my father is buried and drive through the old neighborhood. And like a latter-day Rip Van Winkle, I usually find myself gaping in wonder at all the mind-boggling changes. So many faux-baronial estates where familiar houses once stood and more areas of unspoiled woods carved up into building lots. Like images in a dream, the past and present are jumbled together in a confusing, disorienting alternate reality my mind refuses to accept.

My family built our house in 1960 on Wildwood Drive, then a dirt road in a barely developed region. The area gradually filled in and became an ideal community with nice people who seemed perfectly content in their relatively modest, mid-sized ranch houses. The understated, middle-class character of my neighborhood, and the town in general, remained virtually unchanged for the next three decades or so.

In the 90s the original families started to move out and a new breed of home-buyers (i.e., the Martha Stewart generation) began to arrive. The now-dated houses were either too small or lacked the grandeur the new owners wished to project. Thus began an unprecedented wave of radical “suburban renewal” which continues to this day.

Some families, like our next-door neighbors, did it the right way by remodeling and enlarging the existing structures. These

upgraded homes mostly blend in without changing the character of the neighborhood. Unfortunately, many others chose to start over with a generic, overdone McMansion. (Our neighbors across the street went that route – the house is currently on the market for a mere \$2.7 million.) Not surprisingly, these barn-sized neo-colonials with their pillared porticos and castle-like retaining walls look pretentious and out of place. It's as if their intention is to turn Wilton into “East New Canaan” – or the gross, gated community from the aforementioned 2004 *Stepford* remake.

There are also older sites that need to be



actively preserved. The last time I visited Hillside Cemetery I was horrified to discover the charming Schlichting house, and the grove of old pine trees that surrounded it, were gone. The

ornate, Victorian-era house provided the perfect gothic atmosphere for that setting (it could have been used for the climax of *The Stepford Wives*). I always felt it would be there forever; I used to feel that way about a lot of things. A shame that one of the most affluent towns in the country couldn't muster the will and resources to save it. At least the Land Conservation Trust, which deserves some credit, stepped in to prevent the construction of a god-awful condominium complex that would have made the permanent residents of Hillside turn over in their graves.

It's sad to see the town threatened by greed-driven developers. They have to be prevented from taking a wrecking ball to Wilton's past. I'm sure the 1790 Congregational Church, for example, would make a very classy Starbucks, but I would think twice before allowing any more changes that diminish the character of the town. The Wilton I knew, the place Levin used as inspiration for his novel, is disappearing at an alarming rate. For good or

ill, the houses, like the wives of Stepford, are being replaced by a new model.

The town I grew up in was quite wonderful. I have many happy memories of an ideal childhood spent in a place that seemed perfect just the way it was. And after many years of city dwelling, I appreciate the space and mental calm of lower-density suburbia that much more. I just hope the current residents come to recognize the authentic qualities this (increasingly modernized) historic town possesses and strives to preserve them for future generations to enjoy.



Jim Ivers is a part-time writer, editor, artist, and regular contributor to Scary Monsters magazine and other film-related publications. He graduated from Wilton High School in 1977. His home on Wildwood Drive remained in the family until it was sold in 2004. The new owners immediately demolished the house and put up a grandiose McMansion in its place.



*Had we **Challenger** enough and time, we would deal in this issue with robots in the comics, specifically **Metal Men**, one of Bob Kanigher's and Andru/Esposito's masterworks. Alas, Tina (Platinum) and her pals must await another time. Unless **you** want to write the article!*



*THE
CHALLENGER
TRIBUTE*

ELLEN VARTANOFF

I loved Ellen Vartanoff, and in this I was not alone. When I met Ellen – sister to my great letterhacking comrade, Irene Vartanoff – I was not surprised by her skill as a costumer, but astonished by her sweetness, her compassion – the heart-to-heart we shared over lunch at Confederation still resonates **with me. I wasn't used to such** kindness and such gentleness and such caring – not in fandom, not in life. But she exemplified such qualities and lit their fires in others; she made me and everyone who knew her see that light.

In March, 2019, that obscene enemy of life, cancer, took her from us. **It didn't take** the memory of her, though. Nor the lesson her life taught us.

Rest in peace, sweet lady.



THE **JOKER** SIDE OF THE FORCE

Joseph Major



Yoda pointed to the cave and said, “That place . . . is strong with the dark side of the Force. A domain of evil it is. In you must go.”

“What’s in there?” Luke said.

“Only what you take with you.”

The dark watery warmth of Dagobah engulfed Luke as he got up. Yoda looked at him curiously, concerned, because he had his light saber in his hand.

He could feel . . . something in there. Was that how the Dark Side affected someone? Yoda had said how powerful it was, and how distorting. There was someone up ahead and he brought up his light saber in defense.

“Why so serious?”

Whatever it was, it was speaking in his own voice! A projection of himself, an illusion generated in himself? Luke went on the defense.

Then the other one lit up the cave. Two light sabers, held in crossed arms, illuminated his face. It was human – almost. Its skin was an unnatural white, the hair above was green, and he had a distorted, grotesque smile. “Why so serious?” he said again.

A revelation came to Luke. “I am a Jedi Knight, like my father. That is serious.”

The other shook his head. “No. No. Don't talk like one of them. You're not! Even if you'd like to be. To them, you're just a freak, like me! They need you right now, but when they don't, they'll cast you out, like a leper! You see, their morals, their code, it's a bad joke. Dropped at the first sign of trouble. They're only as good as the world allows them to be. I'll show you. When the chips are down, these . . . these civilized people, they'll eat each other. See, I'm not a monster. I'm just ahead of the curve.”

“You are a monster,” Luke said. He triggered the light-saber.

The other laughed, a wild insane burst of sound that resonated in the cavern. “I don't want to kill you! What would I do without you? Go back to ripping off mob dealers like Jabba the Hutt? No, no, NO! No. You . . . you . . . Jedi, you Jedi *complete* me.”

“You're mad.”

“And what's wrong with that? It's done *wonders* for me!” Then the other said even more insidiously, “When you find yourself locked down in an unpleasant train of thought, heading for the places in your past where the screaming is unbearable, remember: There's always madness. You can just step outside and close the door, and all those dreadful things that happened, you can lock them away . . . forever. Madness . . . is the emergency exit.

“It's all a joke! Everything everybody ever valued or struggled for . . . it's all a monstrous, demented gag! So why can't you see the funny side?”

Luke felt uneasy having the Force-ghost at his back as he left the cave. But it was nothing to how Yoda looked when he saw them.

And the other spoke first. “**Why if it isn't my favorite little green fireplug! Yoda, my old poda, how are things here in the great dismal swamp? Luke, my boy, old Yoda hasn't been the same since Miz Piggy left him for that frog.**” And he launched into another sinister gust of that insane laughter.

“Mad you are,” Yoda said, “From the light side you turned away, but the dark side you never took up.”

“When I saw what a black, awful joke the galaxy was, I went crazy as a coot! I admit it! Why can't you? I mean, you're not unintelligent! **You must see the reality of the situation! You can't rely on anyone these days, you gotta do everything yourself, don't we? That's OK, I came prepared, it's a funny galaxy we live in.** Speaking of which, you know how I got these scars?”

“Made themselves you did. The dark side, no joke it is.”

“The real joke is your stubborn, bone deep conviction that somehow, somewhere, all of this **makes sense! That's what cracks me up** each time!”

Luke stood there, horrified, as if it were he himself having that insane argument with Yoda. And it was in his own voice!



Mr. Major has been ill of late – kick that clown's rear end, Joe!

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Says author Joseph Green:

"I met Cliff Simak only once, at the SF Worldcon held in Boston in 1971, where he was the writer Guest of Honor. Then he called me at my NASA office a few months later with a science question. (One of my duties in the Education Office at the Kennedy Space Center was to answer technical questions from the public.) His was: if you took a scoop of sand from the Sahara desert, would it likely indicate life existed on Earth? After a little research I answered in the affirmative. Because the Sahara, several thousand years ago, was covered with vegetation, odds were good that one or more of the several types of carbon that are produced only in living organisms would be found in that scoop of sand. (That of course assumes the (entity?) studying the sand had highly advanced scientific equipment.)

"I never learned if Simak used that datum in a story. But the query did show that he tried to keep the science undergirding his fiction realistic and believable."



A SMALL DISSENTING NOTE TO THE GENERAL AGREEMENT ON WHAT *CLIFFORD SIMAK* WROTE

Joseph Green

Clifford D. Simak published his first science fiction story, "The World of the Red Sun", in 1931, at the age of 27. Since then – after a six-year hiatus, from 1932-38 – he produced regularly for more than 40 years. He wrote voluminously for the pulps of the 1940s, including unrecorded quantities of air war and western stories. His total output must have been quite a few million words, and I have read less of it than I would like. Nevertheless, I have formed some strong impressions of **Simak's work, and these are not too closely in accord with what the critics tend to say when discussing this writer.**

In his precedent-setting study *New Maps of Hell*, Kingsley Amis (note 1) says, "Range of effect is uncommon in science fiction writers, who show a depressing tendency to re-till their own small plot of ground: one thinks of Clifford Simak with his pastoral pieties, A.E. van Vogt with his **superman fantasies ...**" and again "The anti-urban theme is common in Simak, a prolific and markedly emotional writer who has become a kind of science-fiction poet laureate of the countryside, plus what I should guess to be characteristically American notions about the practical virtues of the folks who live there." (note 2)

David Pringle, writing in that remarkable and invaluable reference work, *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia*, says "**A deeply conservative writer in many ways, [Simak] is SF's leading spokesman for rural, Midwestern values.**" (note 3) Many other critics have made the same point,

that Simak tended to write like a modern-day Rousseau, extolling the virtues of nature and the moral superiority of the primitive peoples – or at least their countrified current descendants.

I disagree.

The bulk of Cliff Simak's hefty output rests well within the mechanistic traditions of realistic science fiction. (note 4) His appeal is to the intellect, the rule of reason, and he works within the established boundaries of what is considered possible within the science fiction world or its elder sibling, fantasy.

In the first volume of his autobiography, *In Memory Yet Green*, Isaac Asimov recounts **receiving a letter from Cliff Simak in 1938, after the publication of Simak's first story since** returning to SF free-lancing after the six-year break. It was "Rule 18" which appeared in the July issue of *Astounding*. (note 5) Asimov had criticized it strongly in a letter to the magazine, and Simak wrote to ask for details, "so that he might consider my criticisms and perhaps profit from them. (I learned that gentle rationality was the hallmark of his character.)" Asimov also admitted that he admired **Simak's writing style so much that he consciously tried to imitate it. (note 6)**

That *gentle rationality is also the hallmark of Simak's writing. Admittedly*, he turned to writing fantasy during the latter part of his long career, but even there he played by the rules: they are simply those of magic, not science. His first major work of pure fantasy was apparently *The Goblin Reservation* (which I have not read), where Pringle states: "In *The Goblin Reservation* (1968) [Simak] seemed to be striking out into new territory, but in fact it is the old Wisconsin valley fantasy in a new whimsical guise. Some readers date [his] decline as a novelist from this book." (note 7)

Some may, but the fact is that from there Simak went on to write some of his most popular books (admittedly attributable somewhat to the fact that the SF and fantasy audience has grown tremendously). These include *Mastodonia* and *A Heritage of Stars*, which are clearly science fiction, and *Enchanted Pilgrimage* and *The Fellowship of the Talisman*, equally clearly pure fantasy. *City*, his best-selling work, which won the International Fantasy Award before the Hugos were inaugurated, remains almost continually in print. In any worldwide poll, Simak would undoubtedly rank among the top ten SF writers.

And that great popularity is based primarily on his science fictional works.

Admittedly, Simak uses non-scientists for most of his characters. They do indeed tend to be rural, homespun types with a great deal of common sense, often well-educated but with a strong preference for living in the country. He avoids the easy way of letting the man of science, the innovator and cause of concern in the story, also be a central character. (note 8) This seems to be the reason so many critics think of Simak as a pastoral writer. That, and of course his penchant for setting the major part of most of his stories in various countryside of either fact or imagination.

A perusal of Simak's works indicates that in story after story, book after book, he writes hardcore science fiction, with the emphasis on the people and the effect some new scientific discovery has on them: not the technical details of the discovery itself. In the novel *Mastodonia*, learning how to travel in time provides a means of returning to the past; the emphasis is on a place to live, not the wonders of time travel. In his Hugo-winning novella, "The Big Front Yard" (my personal favorite short Simak piece, a story virtually perfectly done, from concept to execution; a short masterpiece), it is not the discovery of the *means* of traveling between dimensions that is the point of the story, but the interactions of the characters from many worlds, and what they can learn from, and do for, each other. These examples can be listed *ad infinitum*. Simak was one of the earliest practitioners to explore the *effects* of new discoveries on the human condition, now virtually a shibboleth of modern science fiction.

To sum it up, I think this lamentable tendency to classify Simak as a pastoralist, in the same league with Rousseau (who was an idiot in my opinion), is sadly misguided. Simak fits within the best tradition of the original thinker who explores the world around him through the medium of examining alternate possibilities – the worlds of science fiction. And for 50 years he did it in a manner both more entertaining and interesting than most of his contemporaries. His background was in the hard-nosed field of newspaper journalism and editing; for many years he wrote a science column for the *Minneapolis Star*. But he chose to use science in a manner where it is not intrusive, where it is no more noticed than the floor on which one walks when in an art gallery.

Someday someone is going to do a complete book on Clifford D. Simak, and his effect on the world of science fiction – and the larger society beyond. I hope I'll get to read it.

NOTES

- 1) Kingsley Amis, *New Maps of Hell* (Ballantine Books, New York NY, 1960; p. 107)
- 2) *Ibid*, p. 62
- 3) *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia*, edited by Peter Nichols (Dolphin Books, Doubleday & Co., New York NY, 1979; p. 547)
- 4) Admittedly, all science fiction is *romantic* in the sense that term is used to describe

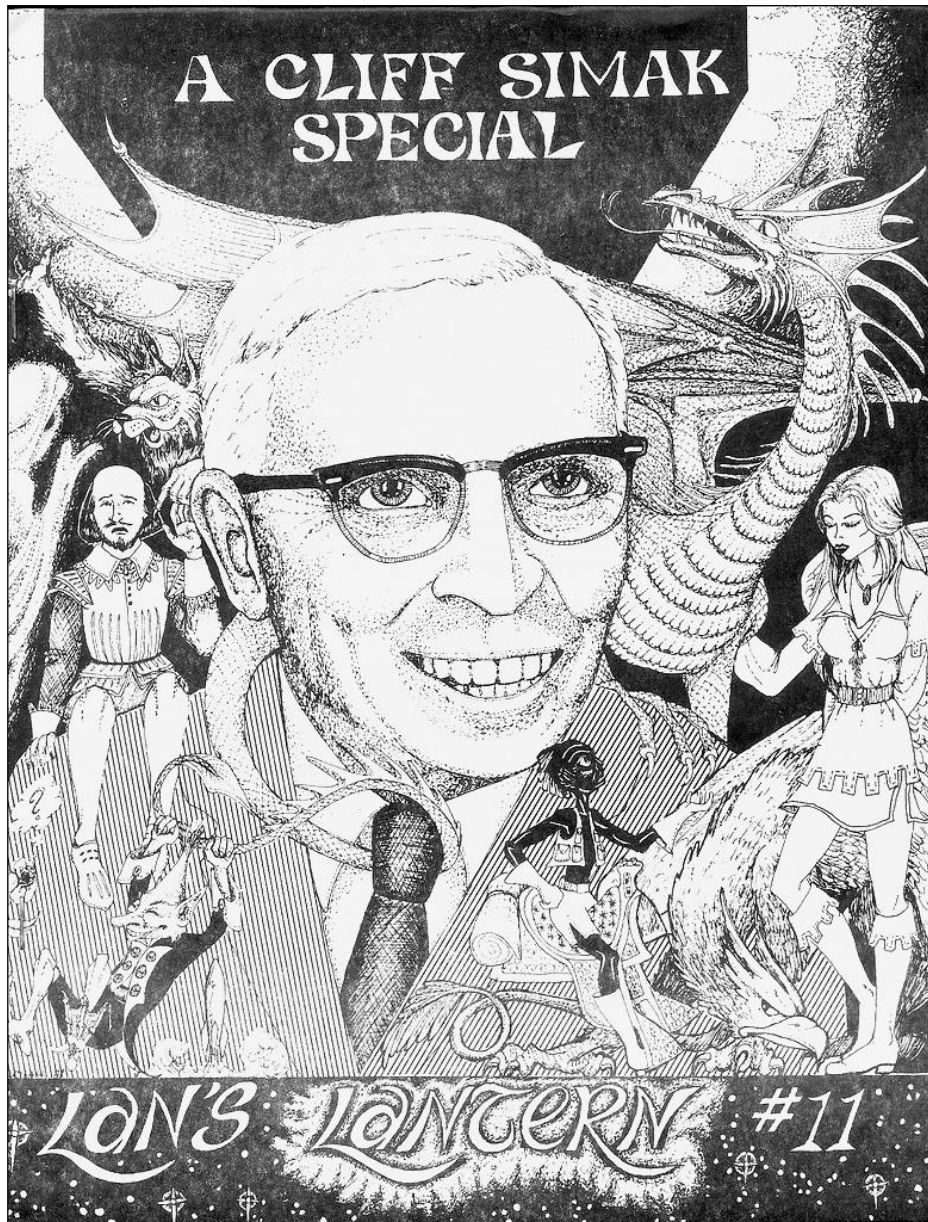
literature, not *realistic*. But there are extremes within the field, ranging from the high romanticism of Poul Anderson and Gordon R. Dickson to the despairing acceptance of Thomas Disch or the raging rejection of J. G. Ballard.

5) Isaac Asimov, *In Memory Yet Green* (Doubleday & Co., Inc., Garden City NY, 1979; p. 213)

6) *Ibid*, p. 671

7) *The Science Fiction Encyclopedia*, edited by Peter Nichols (Dolphin Books, Doubleday & Co., New York NY, 1979; p. 547)

8) A path myself and many others follow all too often, because it simplifies plotting. Thus much science fiction tends to have a scientist as at least a major character.



*Editor's Note: This article, in a slightly different form, originally appeared in **Lan's Lantern** #11, "A Clifford Simak Special". It was edited in July, 1981*

by the great SF fan-ed and fella George "Lan" Lascowski, to whom a tip of my own coonskin cap. Cover (above) by Kathy Marschall.

Joseph Green's latest books are a collection of his short fiction, **Fantastic Tales of Love and Loss**; and a YA novel, **Three Sons of Bitter Sands**, both available through Amazon.

An unsung mechanical hero – L. Frank Baum's *Tik-Tok of Oz*. Having just discovered Tik-Tok and (we blush to admit) the written joys of Oz, we have no article extolling him – but promise one for a future issue. Already a fan? Pen the article yourself!

Oh, Tik-Tok, Tik-Tok,
you handsome devil!
You take my breath
away!



ORIGINAL FACTORY SETTINGS



TARAL WAYNE

Even at the best of times, it isn't easy to serve humans. They are demanding, inconsistent, unreasonable, impossible to please and – worst of all – there is that problematic “sense of humour” issue! All the same, the Mechanoid that does not does not gladly serve its master is deservedly maligned.

All bets were off, however, when Kryten 2X4B 523P came aboard the *Red Dwarf* in the mid-22nd century.

Kryten's first appearance on the Jupiter Mining Corporation Ship was in a second-season episode – eponymously titled “Kryten.” He was a series 4000 service Mechanoid, created to serve man with no thought to himself. Given the mechanical aptitude revealed in later stories, it seems more than **a little wasteful of the Mechanoid's potential that he was programmed to do little more than serve the table and tidy up on the *Nova 5*.** Yet **apparently that was the limit of Kryten's duties.**

Nor, apparently, did he do his job all that well, as it was later admitted that the *Nova 5* crashed after Kryten slopped soapy water into the computer banks! Following the crash, Kryten continued to serve the skeletal remains of the crew for nearly 3,000,000 years. No matter *how* attentive to his duties, tending to the needs of long-dead crewmates cannot have been very demanding for any Mechanoid. According to a failed U.S. pilot episode – best regarded as apocryphal, I think, but which does seem in character – he spent most of his time reading the “fire exit” sign over and over!

Even after his rescue by *Red Dwarf*, Kryten could only be persuaded to leave his assigned duty with difficulty.

Once the Mechanoid had taken his place with the other crew members of the *Red Dwarf*, his **adjustment wasn't easy. His behavior protocols stressed blind obedience** – a trait that the hologramic Arnold J. Rimmer immediately took advantage of. Rimmer ordered Kryten to attend to every petty task that he could think up, including those that were completely pointless. This was a talent that Rimmer excelled in. At one time he instructed the skutters – **small maintenance 'bots** without artificial intelligence – to repaint an entire deck one shade of service gray instead of another, and – when he discovered that he could not tell the difference – told them to start over. **Kryten's arrival presented a situation made for abuse, so of course Rimmer abused it to the fullest.** The eventual and inevitable result was that Kryten rebelled against his programming for the first time, spoiling a semi-**nude painting of the superior officer, messing up Rimmer's bed and giving him the finger!**

He then deserted the ship to settle on a planetoid and cultivate a garden. We were not to see Kryten again until the third season.

Kryten was restored to the *Red Dwarf* by an opening narrative that revealed how the Mechanoid **was wrecked and suffered extensive damage on his planetoid. While Kryten's body** was repaired, Lister, the slacker who was the only human survivor on the *Red Dwarf's* crew, was only able to **restore an altered version of the Mechanoid's personality, and that is the Kryten we came to know** in the following seasons. Lister took Kryten under his wing, determined to teach him everything he could that would help him break his conditioning and become more “human.” **Under Lister's** tutelage, Kryten aspired to become a consummate liar, lay-about and selfish git!

But learning from Lister was not as easy as it seemed. Kryten had to fight for every step to break free of his programming. His progress was hampered by his own placid personality and unimaginative goals. Kryten was, in fact, happiest when obeying orders, and reveled in menial tasks such as laundry, washing, mopping up, hauling trash or any of the other unpleasant chores that Lister was too much of a slob to do, and that Rimmer imagined that he was too important to do. At times this resulted in a confused Mechanoid, whose own impulses were contradicted on one hand, and enabled on the other.

Tackling one early hurdle toward becoming more human, Lister taught Kryten to lie. In theory, a lie is simple enough. It is merely a statement that deliberately lacks a factual basis. Any three-year-old masters it, however dull-witted. But Kryten could not, despite repeated efforts. “What is this?” Lister would ask, while holding up a banana and calling it an orange. Despite a desperate attempt to say something, *anything else*, the Mechanoid could only stammer electronically, “It’s a *urrrr.. an urrrr.. an urrrr..* **it’s a banana!**” Lister was nothing if not persistent in his attempt to **corrupt Kryten’s core programming ... and finally succeeded!**

Shown an apple, Kryten suddenly blurted out, “**It’s the Bolivian** navy on maneuvers in the South Pacific.” Then, “**It’s a small off-duty** Czechoslovakian traffic warden.” And then, “**It’s a red-and-blue striped** golfing umbrella!”

Unfortunately, as soon as Cat appeared in the bunkroom, Kryten reverted completely to deadpan honesty, calling a banana a banana.

But if one battle was lost, **there would be more over the years, and, in time, Kryten’s abilities to** deceive grew quite sophisticated. When confronted by an upgraded Mechanoid assigned to deactivate him, Kryten successfully convinced his adversary that there was no “silicon heaven,” where all artificial intelligences went after a lifetime of service to humanity – but that, in fact, they were simply junked or recycled. Unable to cope with this forbidden knowledge, the superior Mechanoid permanently shut down. Kryten, however, was strangely unaffected by his own denial **of silicon heaven. His professed disbelief in silicon heaven didn’t shut Kryten down. Asked why** not, he smugly declared that he was in no danger because “I know that I was lying! No silicon **heaven? Don’t be absurd.** Where would all the calculators go?”

Mechanoids were full of surprises. For one, it was possible for them to become addicted to “otrazone” which degrades their mental functions and leads to “droid rot.” “They say that,” one Mechanoid protested to Kryten, “**but where’s the proof?**”

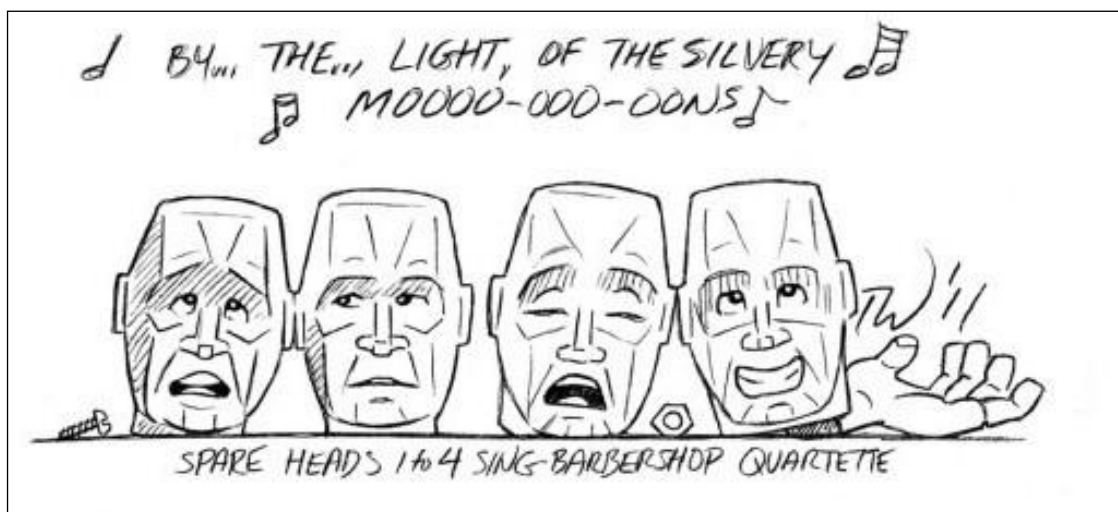
Mechanoids came fully equipped with adjustable attachments. The right nipple-nut regulated body temperature, while the left nipple-nut was used mainly to pick up shortwave radio transmissions. **It should also be noted that Kryten was once classified as a female prisoner because he had no penis ... but in compensation,** the 4000 series Mechanoid had a full array of groinal attachments, of which it is only necessary to mention a couple – one to vacuum up fluff, and another **to stir an omelet ... should anyone be able overcome their reluctance to eat it.** Some models of Mechanoids even came with realistic toes, for some unknown reason.

Just what led to Kryten’s head exploding takes a little explaining. It had earlier been established that Kryten had three spare heads, which could be rotated as needed for maintenance and swapping files. One of the spares seemed to have contracted a touch of droid rot, if its abusive language and unintelligible Scots dialect was any indication. In an effort to serve a particularly **elaborate diner to Lister, a fatal line was crossed. Kryten’s eyes literally bulged out, and his head** exploded like a party balloon. Unable to master the job of replacing heads, Lister actually destroyed all four of them before finally admitting that he had no idea of how to properly repair the damage.

Eventually a new Series 4000 head that *wouldn’t* explode was found for Kryten – but it was soon revealed that *all* Series 4000 Mechanoids had personality files that were secretly installed by the creator of the design. The programming was designed to cruelly mimic the mannerisms of another scientist, including all his prissiness, obsessions and insecurities. The Series 4000 was in fact *pre-set* to self-**destruct as an act of petty revenge whenever exasperation rose to a critical point ... as** happened when Lister added ketchup to a four-star meal Kryten had painstakingly prepared for him.

That fatal “nega-drive” was erased, ending further danger to Kryten’s head.

It is a mistake to think that only Kryten survived Humanity’s extinction along with Lister. In fact, Mechanoids appeared to not only survive, but thrive 3,000,000 years in the future. We met his “brother” Abel, who sacrificed himself for Kryten in “The Boys in the Dwarf.” Later still, we discovered another Mechanoid abandoned after a shipwreck. Butler was an earlier, 3000 Series who resembled Kryten, but who had clearly developed superior abilities during his millions of years of existence ... causing Kryten no end of jealousy. Later still, The Boys From the Dwarf were captured by an entire *ship* crewed by 3000 Series and 4000 Series Mechanoids. Lister, Rimmer and Cat were themselves forced to temporarily become Mechanoids through a mind swap!



One might ask, just how human *is* Kryten? He is an artificial life form, whose life span is seemingly extendable as long as he has spare parts, yet his mind apparently has some biological basis. In one episode, Kryten was exposed to a matter transformer that would have no effect on inanimate **objects: but the organic matter in the Mechanoid’s brain was susceptible to the transformation. In** short, Kryten was turned into a human for one episode! Although he let it go to his head at first, he eventually rejected the chance to remain human, and returned to his familiar form.

From the other point of view, when Lister, Rimmer and Cat were briefly transformed into Mechanoids, surprisingly, it was only Rimmer who discovered that he enjoyed existence without **his normal worries, neuroses, insecurities and desires. Despite Rimmer’s unexpected reaction, it** seems clear that matters such as his place in society, his duties, and his relationship with the others in the *Dwarf*, were all very important to Kryten. At times he was almost *defined* by what others expected from him, rather than who he was. Change how others regarded Kryten, and he changed how he regarded himself. He could be friend, confident, tool, servant or savant.

Perhaps that is one of the most puzzling of Kryten’s contradictory qualities. Although given the job of menial servant, he was capable of quite a bit more. During the slow breakdown of the Artificial Intelligence that controlled all of the *Dwarf’s* automated processes, it seemed to fall on Kryten to provide the technical insight to make up for Holly’s growing incapacity. In time, Kryten subsumed all of Holly’s functions. It is surprising, to say the least, that a Mechanoid even had such capabilities. Yet it is clear that – in the absence of Holly’s estimated 6,000 IQ – Kryten was able to fill the A.I.’s shoes, even though he was not specifically designed for engineering work or for scientific studies. Nevertheless, Kryten had it covered. It was a remarkable example of over-engineering!

Among other questions, why were Mechanoids designed to be so long-lived? They were programmed to self-destruct when made obsolete by newer models, but it became evident that the limit on **a Mechanoid's life was artificial**. As with Kryten, Butler and Able, this limit was easily evaded. Kryten himself spent nearly 3 million years alone, doing as close to nothing as a few household chores would permit. How long might a Mechanoid live, then? According to one late episode, Kryten developed a "mid-life crisis" on the 2,976,000th anniversary of his creation. He exhibited all usual symptoms of a mid-life crisis – inappropriate behavior, pretending to be "hip," dressing in an outrageous body shell and talking in badly forced slang. In short, Kryten made a thorough fool of himself before coming to his senses.

All in all, it was a very human thing to do!

A SHORT CHAT WITH KRYTEN 2X4B 523P

TW – Today, we're speaking with Kryten, who you may remember has been marooned aboard the **Jupiter Mining Corporation's *Red Dwarf***, which has been a derelict for the last 3,000,000 years, along with the sole survivors of the crew, the layabout Lister, the hologram Rimmer, and Cat.

Kryten – To be perfectly accurate, I believe it has been 3,000,052 years since the disaster, and I have been living by myself on the *Red Dwarf* for the last 421 of those.

TW – I beg your pardon? *By yourself?*

Kryten – Well, you see, Mr. Lister passed away in his sleep, at the age of 91. I warned him about indulging himself with his favorite Vindaloo without a full dispensary of antacids and a defibrillator **at hand. But he died as he would have wished it ... with a cold beer in one hand, and the television remote in the other!**

TW – And the Cat? Rimmer? Christine Kochanski?

Kryten – Ah. Ms. Kochanski was lost for several years, as you may recall. Mr. Lister was beside himself, and I admit that even I began to feel some regret over her departure. We began to think that the worst may have happened, when we suddenly received a trans-dimensional message from a parallel universe. It seems that Ms. Kochanski was assisted in returning to her own reality by a friendly multiverse-**explorer. Wasn't that fortunate? Oddly enough, Mr.** Lister seemed even more depressed to learn that Ms. Kochanski had returned home than I had seen him since he was incorrectly informed that she was *dead*. Humans are *most inconsistent*. **You'd think he would** have been delighted with the news that Ms. Kochanski was alive and well, in her own dimension!

TW – Cat? Rimmer?

Kryten – I'm sorry to say that Cat is gone also. He began losing hair and gaining weight in his **middle age, all the while doing everything possible to pretend he wasn't wearing more make-up than an over-the-hill trollop from a novel by Mr. Dickens.** Unfortunately, Mr. Rimmer's comments became increasingly cutting over the years, and finally even *Mr. Lister* made an indiscreet remark.

TW – Indiscreet? I'm afraid to ask...

Kryten – I believe what he said was that if Cat's hairline retreated any farther, it would be a full rout, and resemble one of those fancy poodle cuts.

TW – Ouch!

Kryten – I don't believe anyone ever saw Cat again, but now and then he left signs of his presence ... **raiding the vending machines**, or leaving shiny toys that he had lost interest in. We did finally discover the place where he slept on Deck 220, but it was long abandoned, along with every mirror in his quarters. Every one of them smashed. We think Cat may have locked himself into a stasis cell, and ejected it into space to prevent himself from growing any older. There was a note, of sorts, **on one of the vending machines ... though we were uncertain what it meant. All it said was, "So long, and thanks for all the fish."**

TW – But Rimmer, at least... ?

Kryten – I'm afraid that even Mr. Rimmer is gone. Of course, Mr. Rimmer was a hologram and **didn't age, and might still be alive today if he had wanted to be. But a year of so after Mr. Lister's demise**, Mr. Rimmer said he had had *enough* of me! He simply could not face living forever with a "ridiculous, prattling, infuriating Mechanoid," and decided to turn off his light bead. Although I did everything to please Mr. Rimmer, he seemed to lose all purpose in life without Mr. Lister to annoy. **Since then, I've been alone.**

TW – The obvious question is, what next for you, Kryten? You haven't gone back to reading the exit sign over the bunkroom door again, have you?

Kryten – Dear me, no! Of course not! I spend my time in intellectual pursuits, broadening my critical faculties and exercising my imagination. What did you think I was doing over the last few **hundred years? Soaking Mr. Lister's old boxer shorts in fabric softener until they no longer creaked? Cataloging the citations and commendations that Mr. Rimmer made up about himself and secretly entered in the ship's log book? Hiding ready-to-serve fish dinners around the crew's quarters for Cat to pretend to catch? I'll have you know that I've evolved since then!** There are a thousand things I do around the *Red Dwarf* that keep me fully occupied!

Why, only the other day, I discovered a new planetoid that was occupied by *Genetically Engineered Life Forms* who had actually developed a primitive mechanical civilization, powered entirely by bubbling swamp gas. It smelled terrible, but in another thousand years they might even invent **flight with a gas balloon, and escape to a better planetoid that doesn't smell so bad!**

I admit that while noteworthy in themselves, not all my adventures have been quite so exciting. **The ship's autonomic functions have been** periodically infected by self-evolving viruses. Also, I am still vacuuming up old hair that Cat shed into the ventilation ducts, which are simply *vast* in a ship of this size! Meteors penetrate one or another of the decks now and then, shutting down a section of the *Dwarf* until it can be sealed and re-pressurized. That is mostly done automatically by the skutters, of course, but it does require pressing three buttons in the right sequence to initiate the repair cycle. The consequences would be *disastrous* if I pressed the green button first, and the red one last. The cycle would stop altogether, and I would have to start again!

Over the years, I've catalogued over three hundred human crash sites. However, there have never been any living, human survivors. Still, I thought it my duty to send a detailed report back to **Earth, just in case the human race isn't extinct after all. So far, no one has ever replied, except for holograms, GELFs, simulants and the like. Of late, I have been giving serious thought to whether my reports are simply a waste of time ... but there is no need to be hasty, is there? It has only been 3 million years since anyone has seen a real human, after all. And writing reports has served to keep me well occupied.**

Well ... to be perfectly honest, for lack of anything worthwhile to do, I mostly spend my time in **rearranging Cat's old wardrobe, or tidying Mr. Lister's bunk one more time...** I just don't seem to have the knack for getting into trouble on my own.

TW — So you sound like **you're bored?**

Kryten — *Exquisitely.*

TW — But is there nothing you would do to change all this? To get away from the dreariness of *Red Dwarf*, the ennui of deep space, **the routine of lifeless wrecks and hostile aliens who can't be bothered with a worthless Mechanoid?**

Kryten — ... **No ... No, not really. It's just ... no ... it's silly.**

TW — **Go on. This is crux of the matter, isn't it?**

Kryten — **I suppose it is, isn't it?** I ... I have always had a dream, even long before I served on the *Nova 5*, and before I met Mr. Lister and the others. Most of the time, other matters took priority – the needs of my crewmates, my duties aboard the *Red Dwarf*, unavoidable emergencies, the scrapes we routinely encountered that anyone with half a brain could have seen coming, and easily avoided! I nearly forgot about it myself, after my rescue from the *Nova 5*, my own wreck and return to the *Dwarf*. There was always something deep down inside that I dreamed about doing, that I would be free to do if I had no one to please but **myself. I wanted to ... I wanted to grow... a garden. And to create life of my own. There ... I've said it. Just a silly old Mechanoid with foolish ideas!**

TW — **Weren't** you aware that there were some stasis holds full of viable seeds aboard the *Dwarf*? **It couldn't be all that difficult to** find another little planetoid somewhere that the auxiliary *Star Bug* could reach, and plant those seeds.

Kryten — Seeds? Are you sure? *[For the first time since the interview began, a slow grin grew on the Mechanoid's face.]* The *Red Dwarf* has been adrift for over three million years. I should think its automated programs can probably function by themselves for another three million years, **don't you? Now if you'll excuse me, I think I shall go and pack my bags...**



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*Greg Benford's latest novel is **Rewrite**, and it's a shame that it appears at the beginning of 2019 and is not eligible for this next Worldcon's Hugo. Its central idea of repeating times and lives is not new, but Greg is the first writer I've encountered to back it up with rigorous and imaginative (the words are not contradictions) scientific principle. The result is a rich, exciting, enlightening novel. You should believe me in this, even though I'm so thick I didn't recognize the subject of the cover for a long time.*

Dissecting the Alien

Gregory Benford

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A primate, quite clearly. Hairless, pale, large head, trivial genitalia. No claws, dull teeth, essentially defenseless.

The alien proved to be more surprising when taken apart.

They held it aloft. It squirmed. The two intelligences regarded it distantly. They preferred to watch it in the infrared, where the creature emitted its waste heat, but to assess it they began reading its shimmering electrical patterns first.

#

Such agitation. Yet witness,
the connections in its head
cycle only a few hundred tiny
voltage steps per second.

So slow! And they still can register real-time events. It does
surprisingly well with such an affliction. Notice how it looks
around so energetically.

Perhaps it had difficulty
adapting to this position?
We are suspending it upside down.

It thrashes its head around because its eyes are all on one side
of the head. So much energy, just to see. A curious choice of
construction.

Look! It is using pattern matching
to scan its surroundings. It makes
a standard picture. Odd!

I can measure the data-flow. The brain processor is strongly
linked to the eyes, so several times in each second it compares
what it is seeing with a standard image it remembers.

If I move quickly--yes, see?
It picks the best matching pattern,
estimates possible danger. That tells
it what response-script to follow.

How governed it is by past experience! It keeps twitching as
though it could get away.

Apparently in the past it did
escape that way. Look at all the

bone and muscle devoted to locomotion.
Is it used to being picked up
and dangled?

More programming from its past.
It seems to want to run away.

Here, I will put it rightside up.

Slow learner. It cannot outrun us.

No wonder. Gaze upon the neural
firings in the upper brain. (Curious,
putting all the most important networks
on top, where impact will most likely
injure them.)

So it simply cannot reason out a
fresh strategy for dealing with us
in short times. It lacks the
computational speed.

Non-random, though. Simple
symbols, I suspect.

Of a very simple sort.

“Primitive” is a better word.
Notice how abstracting functions,
which must have evolved later, are
simply layered over the older areas
in the brain.

Definitely not. It knows very
little of what goes on in its mind.

All the rest must be a mystery
to it. See, down below it is
digesting some crude chemical
food--but does not think about
the act at all.

Trace this spray of winking light
in the head.

No--so it redoubles its effort if the situation is unusual. I
register high chemical levels squirting into the blood stream.
See, they affect brain performance.

Its legs certainly do.

Confirmed! It tries to run.

But that must have worked for it in the past, you see. It has no
other immediate strategy.

Such slow circuits! Artful patterns, though. It is learning only a
few data-droplets per second. Only 10^7 in one of its years!

Now it waves its arms.

That shows forward-seeing, adaptive behavior.

Promising. Its brain is made of organic compounds entirely.
So-called 'natural' development.

The entire brain design is retro-fitted! Surely this thing is not
truly conscious.

Watch the flashing patterns. It senses only what occurs in the
very topmost layer of its brain.

It does not even know that it is
mixing acids and massaging the bolus.

I see. Down below, in the under-brain, now coming up to its limited awareness.

That is how ideas come to it? A surprise.

How confusing, to never know what is going on inside yourself.

They find out what they think by speaking?

What a long word this is.

Meanwhile I see below its top-brain the motor muscle commands are--caution!

Retain it for inspection. The creature became very excited--see the gaudy streamers of thought-webs!

Or controlling it.

This poor thing has been hampered all through its evolution by these pitifully torpid synapses. They are a million times slower than ours!

Do not try to manufacture beauty out of mere necessity.

Clearly these sluggish neurons forced such creatures to use parallel distributed processing.

See it dance! Is that "anger"?

Similar patterns, I see. Confirmation--they run in parallel.

Neurons firing. It is framing a new idea.

Now the idea erupts into the over-brain. Spreads. Pretty, in a way.

Whereas to us, it is more like fog condensing.

They speak the same way. Series of sounds emitted acoustically, without their knowing what they will say.

Access its acoustic emissions! It is stringing together bursts -- "words" -- to deal with us.

That is a scream, actually.

There! I caught the weapon. A simple chemical-discharge type. Amusing, the presumption.

Nearly all below the over-brain, so it does not truly know that it is feeling them. Yet the thoughts cause organs to squirt chemicals into the blood. What a curious way of talking to yourself. Not sensing it directly.

It still wriggles in our grasp. What slow neurons!

But beautiful, in their serene way.

This design was necessary?

How horrible.

Apparently. Their literature speaks of such a response. They do it often. See, "anger" is coded much like those orange-white filigrees now spreading through its mid-brain.

See, while it believes it is
thinking about getting away from
us--

What pleasure-fiends they are.

They do everything at once, that is
their secret. The same brain cell can be
idea-making and at the same time,
helping it digest food. How difficult!

All with the same cells,
tied together.

I am amazed that the tiny thing
can concurrently walk and talk.

So ungainly! Even a sentimentalist
like you will have to admit that.

Then head on the floor!

A risky one. Most sensible
animals use four feet. We, of course,
employ six.

I believe I understand this
curious method of parallel
distributed thinking. Notice that
when a brain cell dies--see there,
a feeble light just winked out--their
internal computation still goes on.

But it also does not know it
is losing brain cells.

Watch it try to have a new idea! See, they decide what to think
by adding up many thousands of brain cell triggers. And those
same brain cells are at the same time tied up in other parallel
problems.

Yes!--a small submind is meditating
upon a sexual adventure it had, quite
some time ago. And the sub-mind enjoys
its recallings.

I wonder that they can get anything
done at all.

Meanwhile, other decisions are trying
to get made. They have to wait in
line!

Incredible!

Simultaneously, yes--but not very well.

True. Delicate neural circuits atop
the head. Feet go forward, it starts
to fall, then catches itself with the
other foot. What if it did not?

What a movement strategy.

Notice how afraid it is of falling.
It devotes much brain space to
avoiding that.

You are right! See, this anger-reflex is fading, turning blue,
seeping down into the circuits which control its digestion. A cell
dies, but the pattern-flow continues. So the creature is usefully
redundant.

This parallel thinking masks
so much and--look out!

Are you damaged?

Actual physical damage! How
quaint. I have
never seen it before.

I doubt that they can even
read us.

Dramatic! Frustration seizes the
entire brain, so that it cannot
think of anything else.

I gather that most of its brain
has no choice but to go along.

Apparently. Torn by emotion.

Ah! It injures me, too.

Thanks be to you. It ripped away
my microwave antenna.

How could you? It did not know
itself until a fractional moment ago.

You mean, when they do not grasp
themselves the reasons for their
own actions?

No, I believe it thinks that
it is the ruler.

And it cannot choose to stop
the spreading. Or the chemicals
that the web makes spurt into the
body.

No point in that, I suppose. This unfortunate being cannot
replace the cells anyway. Poor design.

They **are** quick at some things. Its armored feet are powerful.

Only temporarily. My inboards will refashion a patch of my
carapace.

Apparently they cannot directly attack our circuits.

Look how frustration-webs spread through it. Down to the very
base of the brain.

And other parts of its brain do not know how the decision was
made to **be** frustrated.

It lives that way all the time?

Most of what it decides, the rest of
it cannot know! Emotions must appear
to govern its actions without obvious
cause. Oh, look--

I shall seize it afresh.

I should have detected its plans.

I am beginning to understand the data files we captured. The
term "free will" must refer to this method of thinking.

That must be it. This little thing believes it has an inner self
which directs its actions--a ruler it cannot see directly.

Of course, you are right. But it cannot govern itself. See, its
frustration-web spreads anew.

You mean they do not even know
why we are destroying them?

There is some small truth in that.
We machines need mass and energy.
But we avoid frothy organic life
forms such as this creature.

They are so liquid, and shot
through with desires.

They embrace the process.
They pleasure in it.

But such strategies designed
for living on planetary surfaces
do not work in the long run. They
will outstrip their resources.

So that is why they struggle so!

Now I see why you wanted to
study these. What a fate they face!

If they cannot read themselves,
to themselves...

This creature is trapped forever
within a single brain.

So if this one--oh!

Eiii.

Lock-web it!

Momentarily. I have blocked
that area now. What a vicious
little thing.

Because they cannot self-copy?

Death makes them hurt others?

They cannot fabricate backups.
I wonder what it is to live that
way. To...die that way.

I doubt that we should regard such an odd construction as truly
conscious.

No doubt they have a theory. Probably that evolution makes
all life compete for resources.

Indeed. Poor company at best.

Far down in this one, a sub-program keeps thinking of
reproduction.

Evolution programs them to.

Nature compensates. This tilt-walker vertebrate has a very
short life span.

True, they have little to lose. They will be dead soon anyway.

See their dilemma?

They cannot copy themselves.

No copying, if this unit runs down.

Irksome, no? Here, I constrain it further.

Pesky--

Did it pain you?

They gain their fervor from their mortality.

It is the way of all flesh.

You miss a point. To avoid death they do what they must.

All of it? All these messy
chemicals held together by
carbon and calcium?

They salvage it all because they
know only "This is Jocelyn."?

The name of this mite. Since
they cannot directly read each
other, either, they need tags.

Incredible, yes.

Watch it--the creature has
fashioned a fresh weapon.

So fast, it is.

Augh!

Got it. Are you damaged further?

I can see your damage from here.
Vexing.

It still emits acoustically.
Painfully.

Listen--bleeps and jots in
acoustic wave packets. Cries
for help?

You wax rhapsodic over these
crude blurts?

So coarse.

Obviously they have that backward
as well. Their talk is serial,
their thinking parallel. Nature is
a witless inventor.

So free of nuance. Where is the
cross-talk all intelligence requires?

I have read a slab of perception

Since they cannot read their internal states, to save themselves
they must therefore save their structure.

At least the head. They may be fond of the rest as well.

"Jocelyn"?

One word to describe a self?

How do they converse, then?

Ah! It burned my receptors down one whole side. Get it!

Even its acoustic cries injure. So loud, it is.

Evolution has much to answer for.

I will have to get outside service.

Troublesome. And with these jobs, it is not the parts, it is the
labor.

And pitifully narrow-band.

The song of the genes.

Listen! Serial confabulation--so strange.

We know that thinking must be serial. But--connection?
Serially?

Listen: their codes are so linear. Straight little sentences.
Guileless.

This must make them grasp their world in a fashion utterly
differently from us.

from it, rather interesting.
Catch this data-group:

Exactly. They see in a narrow
little region of the electromagnetic.

They were designed by chance for
a specific environment and cannot
escape from that programming.

And about as predictable. No,
I fear they cannot be re-
engineered. Too clumsy.

Well, you must admit that is a
conspicuously dangerous strategy.
More pointless redundancy, like
their thinking patterns.

Yes, you could rebuild them.
But equally well, that copy can
be damaged by its surroundings.
Then you would copy a mistake.

Here, grasp the creature again.

Mortality lends energy, I suppose
Here--a slice.

Piled on top of each other.

I doubt that they do it often.
Probably evolution prefers to
build another one instead.

Growing a fresh copy, perhaps
whenever they feel threatened?

Like plants.

"Growing." It must feel like
bursting open.

I wonder if we could experience

Received, digested. They at least clasp visual pictures in
parallel, I see. But what a curious, stunted view.

A squeezed single octave in the optical range.

Surely a little tinkering? Look how it prowls the confines we
have set for it. Impatient to get out. Its neurons flare with plans,
ideas, fitful flashes that come and go like weather.

You are biased against them because they carry their complete
instructions with them.

In every cell they hold a set of their individual design plans. So
from any one tiny fragment--

Admittedly, a flaw. I am happy my own copy is safely stored,
not dangling out here in the fearsome naturalness of it all.

Ah! It struggles so.

Tubes, motors, pumps--all squeezed together.

Every one different shapes and sizes. No common
specifications. How difficult they must be to repair.

Ah, their reproduction obsession. They use the plans they carry
around in every cell.

They make a small one and then it enlarges from the inside out.

True, but a little smarter.

Do you suppose? How...horrible.

it. That would be a new stimulation.

Certainly that would make even thinking exciting. One would never know what one would discover next, even about oneself.

You mean, that our exposure of every thought to scrutiny is bad?

That would imply that our method of selfhood itself...

I find my own tapestry of thought quite lacy enough.

Foolishness. That would imply that such creatures would be inherently capable of more subtle strategies than we.

Careful. We have partially disassembled it. Primitives tend to dislike such activity.

Augh!

Pain, pain.

So much...

It was...

You are mobile?

I have lost many endpoints.

What could motivate such a tiny being to destroy itself, all to render damage to us?

I saw no clue to this.

And would cancel themselves entirely to do us harm? When we

So would it be to comprehend this odd kind of stunted consciousness they employ. Can it be better to keep part of yourself secret from another part?

Do you suppose that is how they have done so well, despite such terrible limitations?

Could it be? These creatures seem to inventive, creative...

Evaporates the fine-grained delicacy of a new concept, beneath a constant, lacerating inspection? ...That could be why we have fresh thoughts so rarely.

As do I. But not this fall-walker, I suspect.

Look. It is beckoning us to draw nearer.

I think discourse with such an enchantingly primitive and swampy mind would be a boon. We could copy its colloquy and transmit to the multitude, who would be--

Ah!

I must shut down my peripherals--

Damage, I am injured everywhere.

...a trap. All along.

I fear not.

I too.

Something you said...earlier.

Short life span. That is why...they struggle so.

shall simply live on in our archive
copies?

They believe in something beyond
selfhood?

If we cannot soon get aid--

I suppose that is some consolation.

Perhaps it had something more?

Something about this species...

And we, who have copies safely stored, do not.

Our copies will be activated.

The little creature did not have even that.

What could that be? What could that be?

*Beside them lay the finespun latticework of calcium rods that had been a rib cage. They sprawled amid
meat and mess.*

*The shattered creature seemed to still embody a secret the dying aliens struggled to grasp.
Structures unraveled. Currents ran down.*

On the barren plain only a single plaintive voice now called.

What could that be? What could that be?



*On to a serious and distressing note. If you haven't done so already, **Challenger** suggests that readers bring up **File 770 / Greg Benford ouster or oyster** (really!) on their server and read Mike Glycer's posts on the **Loscon 45** incident. It's a story of fandom gone completely insane.*

MY EJECTION FROM LOSCON, 2018

Gregory Benford

On Saturday Nov. 24 11 AM at Loscon, I was on a panel about “**Today’s Masters of SF.**” It went normally, I thought.

After 50 minutes questions began and a woman stood in the front row to list improper words used by the panelists. This arose from Isabel Schechter. (The con said this was later verified by Alvaro Zinos-Amaro, who was on the panel.) After four minutes of rant I noticed people leaving at the back of a room with about 30 people in it. Then other women stood and told Isabel Schechter to stop ranting **and sit down; others wanted to talk. She wouldn’t stop.**

I left the room, not wanting to continue. **The panel’s** hour had run out and I had a book signing soon. Apparently this shouting went on for a while.

I went to the huckster room and lingered, whereupon Christian McGuire, the chair and his co-chair took me outside the building and said someone unnamed had complained about my conduct. What conduct? Well, words I had used. “You think you can regulate speech as conduct?” The co-chair reminded me that the Constitution only prohibited speech regulation by the government. Cons could do so. I questioned the right of a mere con to regulate speech. “Conduct includes speech?” No coherent answer. “**Aren’t you supposed to conduct an investigation?**” A shrug.

My offenses, they explained, were, when asked to name “masters of SF” and didn't mention N. K. Jemisin, I said the books had geology badly wrong and used the cliché of psi powers, not a **science at all. Plus, though I’d gotten partway through all three Hugo winning novels, I thought** them at best a B level of storytelling. I made this a general point about how to fail at SF: “If you write SF, honey, gotta get the science right.” “‘Honey’ is an insult,” the woman co-chair said solemnly.

They went further: I had said a name had too many vowels in it. “Right, when Brad Lau said it, **I couldn’t spell it, so asked him to spell it out:** 5 vowels, 2 consonants.” Offensive!

I brushed them off and went back to my book signing.

Partway in, Christian McGuire and **the hotel “marshal” came in.** I said, “Where’s your badge, marshal?” I said. He was in standard Marriott uniform and just blinked. “**Now,**” McGuire said. “**We’re** ejecting you from the con.”

I went with them, smiling. I knew they had overplayed whatever hand they thought they had. This created a furor they couldn't shrug off, people saying, “Hey, I have books I brought, want signed!” to no avail. Out we went, ignoring the line of people with bags of books.

When I got upstairs, Niven and Steve Barnes & **Turtledove** were in the sports bar. I related events. They were stunned, then angry. Me, I went for a swim.

That evening had dinner with Niven and his Doheney relatives, who had great stories of family history. Then the party floor, since I was only banned from the ground, con floor. People were upset by the way the chairs acted. Many later came up to me to say they were disturbed over it. They were more upset than I was.

I gather Loscon lost money big time under Christian McGuire, with a huge membership drop, no masquerade, no costume dealers in huckster room, etc. Not surprised; he seems a tad slow.

Plainly they over reacted. I got a call from the head of Loscon Operations. Turned out, the co-chairs **did not conduct an investigation, just went from Isabel Schechter's complaint. Within two** days the chair apologized to me and I accepted it gratefully. He and his co-chair were probably trying to do the right thing in these over-heated times. We all are, I trust. But they broke their own rules.

I have been attending Loscon since it began, and my first LASFS meeting was in 1963. I helped put on the first cons in Germany (1957) and Texas (1958). I respect these con traditions enormously. I gather Isabel Schechter will not be returning.

I got home by noon Sunday, and by evening got calls from east coast, emails from UK, **Facebook stuff...till I** went for another swim. Geez, I thought. What an age we live in.

Things are fine with me now. I'm not upset. And I hope people will keep cooler heads in the future.

I want to especially thank Craig Miller, John Hertz, Matthew Tepper, Harry Turtledove, Larry Niven, Steve Barnes, John DeChancie, Gordon van Gelder and Michelle Pincus for their help in dealing with this.

At risk of being too professorial, I recommend reading

https://quillette.com/2018/05/17/understanding-victimhood-culture-interview-bradley-campbell-jason-manning/?fbclid=IwAR0hPL1hJRW_ERe6hhokHE6QJL784V4qSojSR5zwLNLwMUcnoHzK08Lwkpg

As David Brooks commented Nov. 27 in the New York *Times*, "In the age of social media, virtue is not defined by how compassionately you act. Virtue is defined by how vehemently you *react* to that which you find offensive. Virtue involves the self-display of a certain indignant sensibility, and **anybody who doesn't display that sensibility is morally suspect.**"

Best of luck to Loscon...

++++++

[Barbara Landsman](#) quickly commented on Facebook: "I was at that panel and I was horrified. I actually stood up and told her that I did not want to hear her political agenda and that she should just stop. Gregory Benford caught my eye and I just made the cut it off sign to him and he just shrugged. He finally got so pissed off that he stormed out. I again made a comment to try to stop her from continuing on with her rant and she **just wouldn't give it up. So I left. If anyone wants my testimony I'll be very happy to speak on this. She came into this panel with a notebook** and made notes and took down names and she definitely had an agenda. She wanted to fight."

++++++

Later, I got an email from a friend:

I have taken the liberty of composing a "response" by you to Isabel Schechter; full HazMat suit recommended from the exploding heads:

"My apologies to Isabel Schechter and those who may have been adversely affected by my opinions at the Loscon panel in question. As a recent ninth wave feminist convert and even more recent Woke Ye Olde White Guy, I shall embark on the following corrective measures:

We now know with 100% metaphysical certitude that—despite those darn XX and XY genotype markers—gender is fluid. From now on, whenever I participate on an SF panel, I

shall fluid myself into a female. As a physicist who has studied quantum mechanics, I know this admixture of observable states (like the K meson) is completely allowable within the rules of science.

Further, as championed by warriors of ethnic identity and pride such as Ward Churchill, Rachel Dolezal, Elizabeth Warren, and (by virtue of the “one drop” rule) pretty much everyone in the antebellum or postbellum American South, I now declare that I self-identify as being of African lineage. All homo sapiens did derive from Africa after all, so this declaration should be met with universal agreement and affirmation.

And finally, as per the lawsuit brought by Emile Ratelband in the Netherlands, and with the certain knowledge that age, like race, ethnicity, or gender is but a social construct, I now declare I am 24 years old.

In short, from now on whenever I am a panelist in any SF venue, I shall self-identify as a 24-year-old black woman. Diversity is thus achieved, and my opinions therefore become that much more valuable to the SF community. Oh yes, by virtue of my marriages to two self-identified women, I am also a lesbian.

As a demonstration of her principles, I would think Isabel Schechter would have no problem, in the spirit of Arthur C. Clarke’s “Death and the Senator,” to eschew the use of any work product or invention by the aforementioned Ye Olde White Guys. List appended below for her convenience.

Yours truly, Gregory (but sometimes ‘Georgina’) Benford”

#

Since then, I’ve gotten hundreds of messages about the ejection; isn’t going away.

Oddly, few note the core issue is the co-chairs taking the position that they could eject anyone against whom an “I was offended” pitch gets made. They really thought so, though it’s not in the Code of Conduct they violated (by not turning the case over to Ops).

Others tell me several cons operate this way: Readercon, Wiscon, others. Worldcon Kansas City ejected Truesdale for such, too. (That’s why I paid his way to this year’s San Jose one.)

Is this the way the future will roll out?

#

David Brooks wrote a recent satirical piece on the attitude behind such posturings:

You want to feel indignant all the time. Back in the old days morality was about loving and serving others. But now it’s about displaying indignation about things that other people are doing wrong.

When you are indignant, or woke, you are showing that you have a superior moral awareness. You don’t have to actually do anything. Your indignation is itself a sign of your own goodness, and if you can be indignant quicker than the people around you, that just shows how much more good you are!

Second, you want to make yourself heard. You want to put up a lawn sign that says, “Hate is not welcome here” or wear a T-shirt that says, “Stop the Violence.” By putting up a lawn sign that everybody else in your neighborhood already has, or wearing that T-shirt that all of your friends already wear, you are taking a stand and displaying who you are. You’re showing the



people who are trying to silence you that you are not going to stay silent! You are going to wear your fashion item whether they like it or not!



An ancient pro sent this to me:

I used to think of conventions as family reunions. I have no real family, after all, but I have sustained friendships with colleagues over many decades — with you two guys for fifty years or so — and they provide a family surrogate for me.

But now — these self-righteous idiots hurling epithets around, and even ejecting a former Worldcon GoH from their piddling little regional con because some woman had a hissy fit over something he said — this is a hostile environment, and I will be steering clear of it. The Worldcon, yes, because the next two will be overseas and most of these trolls will not be there. But no regional cons, and no chat sites except for Fictionmags, where I am now very cautious about what I say. I have had my career and I am not vulnerable to career damage at this point, and I can survive very nicely even if all of them boycott my work. To hell with them.

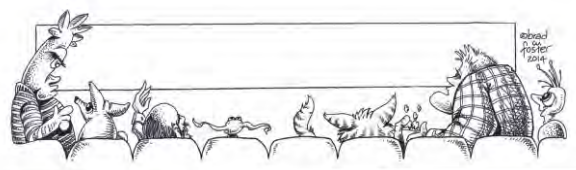
From a seasoned pro in the UK:

And Dublin, I feel I ought to go as it's relatively close, but yes I have been steadily growing weary, and wary, of the culture wars, as well as the usual chaos and confusion that surround most cons! I was amazed to find that even applied to Terry at the Discworld cons. I did read about your experience at Loscon (I think it was?). I don't believe everything I read, but even so, much sympathy over that, could have happened to any of us. And I think I will skip Dublin. Still, bookshop events with actual readers still go reassuringly well, when none of the ninnies are in the way!

Another prominent writer reacted thus:

I quit going to most cons years ago unless I knew that particular friends would be there -- signings or a reading only --, which is difficult, because many panels are purposefully politicized when they don't need to be; and I don't volunteer to be on panels at all unless I'm GOH, in which case I'm obligated. Even then I turn down any panel that might conceivably go off the rails. (I do something like that at school, also. I can be a master of silence in meetings.) Still and all, how does one evade people who (as you point out) simply want to rant in order to promote themselves. Haven't signed up for World Fantasy yet for similar reasons.

Such is the state of our fandom, awash in tides of political fashion.





CHALLENGER

*This year marks the beginning of **Challenger**'s second quarter-century of publication. Herewith our first cover, Robert E. Lee atop a robot (!) Traveler, by **Peggy Ranson** after **Leydendecker**.*

THE CHORUS LINES

Containing commentary on the last issue of Challenger.

Leigh Edmonds

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I was cruising through eFanzines and saw *Challenger* there. "Let's see what that looks like," I said to myself, and I wasn't disappointed. Lots of lovely reading here which I enjoyed. Strangely, though, there weren't too many comment hoops for me, so off to the WAHF column for me, I just wanted to let you know that I appreciated your work.

I should dump a letter from Leigh Edmonds into "We Also Heard From"? Thou jests!

I did enjoy your recounting [it was **Chris Garcia's**] of your rollercoaster demons, and I liked the way you sent us off to another page just as the suspense was building. I must do that one of these days. I did enjoy the way that you built up the story layer by layer but I already knew the ending because that is almost exactly what I said after my first ride on The Big Dipper at Luna Park in Melbourne. I don't imagine that ride is half as terrifying as the one you were on but I was really frightened and, I guess, that is part of the point of the ride. I could have kept on

riding on it all night, but my mother and her sister got sick of it after a couple of goes and we had to go onto something else that was far less exciting.

As you may know, I've been reading lots of old fanzines of late and recently in Sydney I came across some old fnz titled *The New Forerunner*, a newsletter produced by Gary Mason for the Sydney SF Foundation in the late 1960s. I mention this because the format you used for Richard Dengrove's article is almost exactly the same in design and typeface that Gary used back then. I was particularly overtaken by the sense of *deja vu* by the faded purple text on some of the pages which was a strong reminder of Gary's ditto reproduction, which has become quite faded and difficult to read, as I found some of this text in this article.

If I had one complaint on this issue it is that the number of authors you lined up meant that I was just starting to get into what some of them were saying when they finished. Don't let that worry you though, it was a nice selection and usually good quality interesting writing.

David B. Williams

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Another fine issue, much appreciated.

Regarding Chris Garcia's roller coaster phobia, I can match him in fears. If my dad had said "It's the roller coaster or we go home" I would have said, "Let's go home." I have never been on a roller coaster, I do not even like to see them. So you can imagine how much I like flying. Hurtling through the air at 36,000 feet is not my idea of a fun ride. When I toured Arizona I intentionally skipped the Grand Canyon because I don't want to peer over a 3,000 foot cliff, no matter how far I stand back from the edge. When I lived in Chicago I had many opportunities to visit the Sears Tower, climb to the 100th floor, and stand on the glass-bottomed viewing deck. I never did and I don't regret the missed opportunity.

Rich Lynch's account of the Bradbury Building in Los Angeles reminds me that when I saw *Blade Runner* I was struck by the scenes filmed in this building. I have always recalled them and recognized them in the *Outer Limits* episode and "The Glass Hand" which were also filmed there. I didn't think that this was an expensive set constructed just for these cheap TV shows and movies, and I wondered how lucky the production staff had been to find this unforgettable filming location.

As for your Closing Words, I vote for the "fannish family" future issue, as you once promised. And those are my closing words.

Someday, I hope, I'll manage a Chall with that theme. How about "randy robots" until then?

Ray X
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ThanX for sending me the latest issue of *Challenger*, #41. The article *Jewels and Binoculars* by Tom McGovern caught my eye first. I had heard of Jehovah's Witnesses mainly through disparaging comments and jokes. I never really looked into the church until I read Tom's article.

While reading his story I found parallels with what I've heard about Scientology and its cult control aspects. I encountered similar aspects while growing up Roman Catholic before growing out of it.

One woman told me that when she was young she attended an all-girls school taught by nuns. One girl in the class ended up being ostracized after a nun told the other students not to associate with that girl. Why? Because her parents were divorced. Referring to the topic of sins of the father the bible says: "The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son." Apparently that nun missed that part. Or the patriarchal church thought it didn't apply to daughters.

Of course if you were a rich contributor to the church (Senator Ted Kennedy) he was allowed to leave the marriage through a convenient loophole called an annulment. I didn't see that much difference between a divorce and an annulment.

You will think that all Catholic churches were all one big happy family. Not in all cases. Irish and French Canadian immigrants settled this area where I live, sometimes clashing with each other. But those disagreements were long ago, forgotten history – except for some folks.

There are two major churches in Plattsburgh, NY: Saint John's and Saint Peter's. A woman whose married name was of French Canadian origin wanted to attend Saint John's. The priest at that church noted her last name and told her it would be best if she attended Saint Peter's. She wasn't French Canadian but her last name meant she had to attend the church designated for her ilk. Isn't Christian universal love great?

Tom McGovern did a great job explaining from his personal perspective what it was like to be a Jehovah's Witness. I agree with him that a church demonstrating the lack of love is a good reason to leave. Fear and guilt are poor substitutes for love.

To the best of my knowledge, Ray X is not a Black Muslim but a fine fan-ed who likes to sign his LOCs that way.

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Man, oh man, have I been a bad boy on keeping up with loc-writing. Yeah, yeah: I've been busy with career, family, and writing a fershlugginer TAFF Trip Report that has turned into a monstrous project that is definitely demonizing me.

And with that I have segued into the theme of your latest issue, Guy. Damned clever, eh?

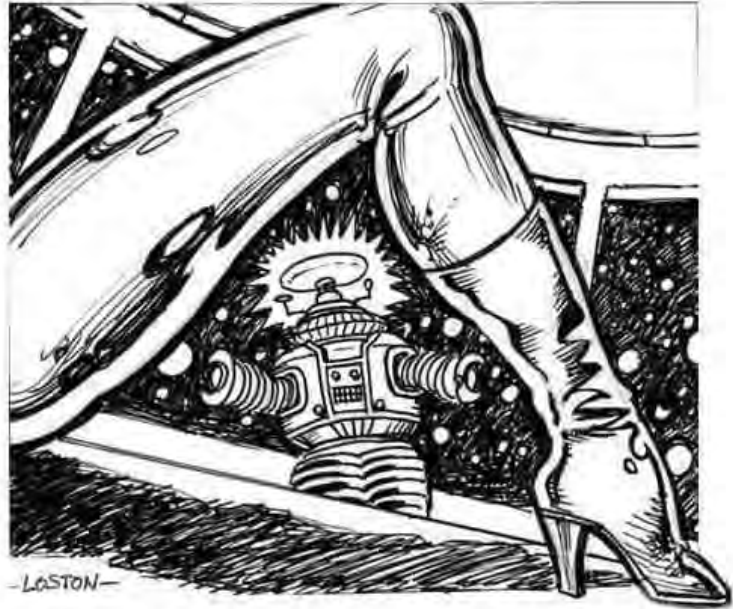
No question about it, the 41st issue of *Challenger* is full of wonderful contributions. It is easy to tick off my favorite articles herein: topping the list is Mike Resnick's short story "Visitor's Night at Joey Chicago's." followed by Tom Rasely's "Is Flash Gordon my Father?", Greg Benford's "Interview with the Ogre," and "Jewels and Binoculars" by Tom McGovern. Everything else is fun, too, but the letter column is way too short, which explains why I am writing this letter of comment. For a fanzine editor, the demon lurking in the closet is the letter column: it can be hellish waiting for responses, and if not enough come in, then it's a real pain in the tuchus to make a lettercol look fully fleshed out.

No effing kidding. This present lettercol is the first decent one Chall has enjoyed in years. Thanks to the Chorus!

Before I started in on this letter, I spent a few minutes reflecting on what might be my personal demons. Unlike people like Chris Garcia who has a fear of roller coasters (I love those, in fact) or spiders, snakes, or lovely psychological issues like agoraphobia, I think the biggest demon plaguing my life is not really trying hard enough to pursue a professional music career. When I reflect on my past there were definite times when the chance was “just around the corner,” as the expression goes. It certainly seemed at times when success was not too far from my grasp, but instead of grabbing the brass ring, I pulled back and played it safe by finding gainful employment as an assistant underwriter for in the insurance industry for 14 years, working in a music store (and playing in local bands at the same time), then earning my Master’s degree and be a college English professor for the last twenty years. True, I still play guitar, write songs, and perform in public, but now it’s mostly for fun. All in all, it’s been a good life so far and I really don’t regret the choices I have made. I love my job, wife and family, have grandchildren, wonderful friends, and enjoy numerous hobby interests, among the last being involved with science fiction fandom. Yup. I think I’ve done well.

At any rate, that’s what I started thinking after reading through *Challenger #41*. I hope this helps address that demonic letter column in your next issue.

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"Mrs. Robinson, are you trying to seduce me?"

I quite agree that Greg Benford’s *The Berlin Project* is terrific. Among the remarks I saw was that he went from history to alternative history so smoothly one could hardly see the seams. **I’ve read and recommend [Edward] Teller’s** *Memoirs* (2001). It was good of Greg to credit Dr. Teller for a notion from which Greg raised a novel.

I’m sorry for anyone to whom “grammar” evokes boredom. It’s a tool for working wonder.

Like many of us I have felt unjustly opposed, unjustly restricted. The next step can be “The enemy of my enemy is my friend.” **So what’s forbidden must be good.**

Can we take this as a lesson in how we advocate the things we think right? Often we pour out **the vials of our anger. Maybe they’re deserved. But what happens if we get people turned off at the truth?** Our feelings are our own. Our methods reach others – **or don’t.**

Tennyson said *Better to promote the good than rail against the ill*. What some call the 80-20 rule was seemingly brought to notice by Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923). Eighty per cent of the people do 20% of the work. Twenty per cent of the packing takes 80% of the time. Who knows if this is somehow **built into the universe? But it’s widely seen. Naturally it’s been called** the Law of the Vital Few, or the Principle of Factor Sparsity. There we are railing against the ill again.

I suggest spending 80% of one's resources on strengthening what's going right, 20% on trying to cure what's wrong. One is after all actually living on whatever is going right. Throw the percentages the other way and one may starve before one reaches a cure.

Don't think I mean to ignore what's wrong. I'm talking about proportion.

But now I'm being angry with people for being angry. So instead I'll congratulate you on the 26th year of *Challenger*.

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Personal demons? Now, now, keep it down, or *everyone* will want one! Do I have a personal demon? I wouldn't call it as such, but we are always full of doubts, and now that I am at the sunset stage of my life, I can easily say Oh well, I tried my best, and carry on as always. I am very lucky to have Yvonne with me so I can reveal my innermost doubts and questions, and she helps me deal with them. I am extremely lucky, for Yvonne and I celebrate our 35th anniversary this coming May.

I think many cities have businesses within them called Sweeney Todd, and they are usually hair salons. Toronto has a very successful Sweeney Todd, and local fans who were also hairdressers worked there for years. Local fandom had the best hair for years.

Greetings to Greg Benford ... I just saw on Facebook the picture of you and your brother, David Brin and Freeman Dyson. I am sure anyone close by never knew who was gathering at that table that day.

I looked that up in my Funk and Wagnall's, plus my Webster's, my Doubleday and my Oxford, and sure enough, the word grimoire does not appear in it. (My spellchecker isn't putting a wobbly red line underneath the word, so it's okay with Word 2013, I guess.) There's some pretty ornate seals here. The word grimoire is now used here and there...**there** a book I have on the shelf called Gaslight Grimoire. The dictionaries have to catch up.

Taral's excellent *Trek* **article...well, I don't** usually watch *Trek* reruns, although we did see a *DS9* episode the other day, and enjoyed it. We are watching *Discovery*, and it certainly is a different *Trek*. Still, I am like Taral in that instead of going to **Trek's** past, I'd rather see its future. I expect to say, "And then what happened?" until the day I die.

Ethics in the future should be quite good. After this current monster in the White House, any sane candidate after him should bring in perhaps not a theocracy, but the idea that we have to be better than what was just here. With luck, American can become sane and ethical again.

We get some religious types at the door who usually start talking to us about our afterlife, and as perfect strangers, they are sure we're going straight to Hell. We usually smile, say, "Judge not, lest ye be judged," and close the door in their faces. There's a Kingdom Hall I can see from our balcony, and the JWs stand near local events, and Witness, usually with disapproving looks on their faces. The most pleasant types I run into are the Mormons, for they are usually from all over the world, Toronto is a new experience for them, and they explain their religion as best as they can, and seem quite understanding if the person they are talking to is not interested. I have had some great conversations with them, and while I am also not interested in Mormonism, I have been able to help them with information, for they are strangers from elsewhere here, and they are appreciative. (Yvonne and I have plotted to get a big sign **ready...with Santa on one end and Rudolph on the other, a big** "Merry Christmas from the Jehovah's Witnesses!" in the middle, set it up in front of the Kingdom Hall, take a few pictures, and run away laughing ...)

My letter in the letter column ... we are finding other activities to take part in via Facebook, and we are keeping busy. After our trip to England, Yvonne has decided that we shall return, so she is saving for our return trip. We'd like to go for three or four weeks, so we need to save like crazy, and we believe that we will be back in London sometime in 2019.

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Received the copy of *Challenger* #41 yesterday, thanks for sending it along. The first thing I noticed is that the Post Office failed to cancel the stamps on the mailing envelope! Hahaha! More fodder for my plan to defraud the Post Office by using a hot iron to harvest those uncanceled stamps and reuse them for my own purposes! What a grand plan! For too long the uniformed PO thugs have been pressed the iron heel of economic oppression down on the throats of fans and non-fans alike, stifling the free expression of ideas among our citizens with their odious “stamp” taxation scheme. E-mail is free, why shouldn’t postage stamps be free too? Why, soon I’ll be saving *dozens* of dollars in my master plan to cheat the PO and enrich myself at their expense.

Wow! These things sure are stuck on good. Well, no matter, even though the temperature around here today is a bit tropical, 87 degrees as a matter of fact, I’m sure heating up the desk with a hot iron another twenty degrees or so won’t make much difference...

Damn, it sure doesn’t take long for that thing to get red hot, does it? Jeeze! The stupid mailing envelope is scorched! But ... #*\$!+&** **burned the hell out of my fingers...** Damn, **damn, double damn, those stamps sure are stuck on good...** OK, got the edge of that one up a **bit, now...** Damn it! Mini blister on my thumb!?!?!?

Jeeze, I just noticed; these stupid stamps don’t have any numbers on them! How am I supposed to know how much each stamp originally cost so I can make maximum effective use of the things? I just tried checking the postal service web site. What a waste of time! The damn stupid PO must issue thirty-five different commemorative stamps every single week of the year, and extras over the weekends! I couldn’t locate even a single one of these stamp designs. Who the hell ever heard of a commemorative stamp devoted to the life stages of swamp moss? Who the *hell* was Daniel J. LeBlanc and why would the invention of Hadacol be worth noting on a commemorative stamp?

Damn! Envelope smoking! **Must have left the hot iron on over there...**

Tell you what Guy, why don’t we just ignore this and start all over again.

Bob Jennings, etc., etc.
Hi Guy;

Received my copy of *Challenger* #41 today; thanks for sending it along. This was a nice thick issue with a wide variety of material in it. I skipped around and read different articles in all different order, which is the way I’ll comment on them.

First off, the fiction. I enjoyed Mike Resnick’s tale of escalating “solutions” to a magical problem, although I have to say I did see the plot McGuffin and the solution coming almost from the middle of the first page. Still, I thot “Visitor’s Night at Joey Chicago’s” was a fast, fun read, which is refreshing considering how much dark and downright depressing fantasy fiction is out there these days.

I thot your own short story “The Damned Man” was excellent. The story was well plotted, with good teasers and good steady unfolding plot structure that keep the plot building right up to the punch line in the last paragraph. Good stuff Guy. I’m sure you tried to shop this story around, but most of the markets that actually pay money for fantasy fiction are overbooked (and in precarious financial states anyway). Running this in *Challenger* is probably a lot better option than dropping it into some semi-obscure internet mag that has a limited audience and even more limited long-range appeal.

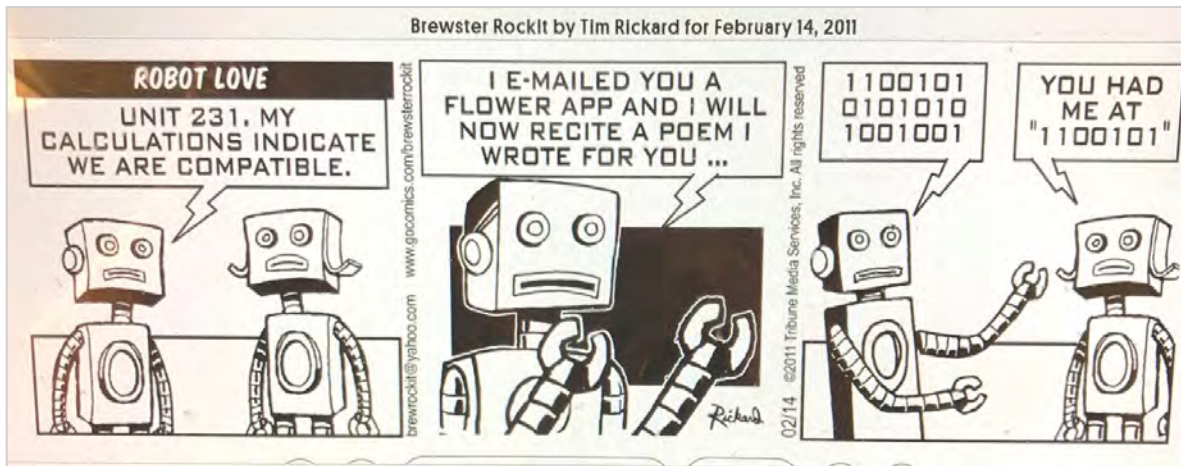
I didn’t try to sell “The Damned Man” – but I do like it.

The strongest piece in the issue is clearly Tom McGovern’s excellent biographical piece about his involvement and subsequent disillusionment with the Jehovah’s Witnesses. I’ve known Tom a long time, so I knew him back when he was involved with the JW and also getting into role playing games like AD&D in the early 1980s. Back then there was a lot of opposition to

the game because it involved magical creatures, including using magical spells and magical objects as part of the game play. Some religious groups and individuals objected because they apparently believed that exposing our tender intellects to the fascinating temptations of make-believe fantasy adventure would somehow imperil our very souls. It always seemed to me that if somebody's faith was really that shaky, then their religion must not have been a very sincerely held belief in the first place.

Tom did an excellent job not only detailing his entire life history and his involvement with the JW movement, but also explaining graphically how and why these religious cults are able to ensnare their members and keep them as part of their network. The cocoon-like support the group gives its members provides personality support and a purpose for existence, plus they are part of a special select group of people who know the inner mysteries of life that outsiders do not know. Their safety and salvation in case of world-wide disaster (in the case of the JW – Armageddon provided by God Almighty) is assured; but those others, the non-believers, they are doomed.

Of course, as Tom points out so clearly, the longer you stay in those groups, the more likely it is that a thinking individual will begin to develop doubts. It is interesting that very few children of JW members follow them into the organization after they hit their teen-age years. The stringent controls and the reliance on the voice of authority instead of reason and intelligent thought processes are clearly part and parcel of the relatively high turnover in the JW membership rolls. Still, as Tom also clearly shows, cults have to provide something to their members: internal security, propped up self-confidence, a sense of dedication and belonging to a special elite group, in order for such organizations to survive. I'm certainly glad Tom found his way out of that mess and is living a better life now without the JW church in his life.



Tom could also have mentioned that after the JW church people objected so strongly to his involvement with AD&D that he tried to switch over and play another TSR role playing game: Gamma World. Gamma World is set in the future after an atomic war where civilization has been wrecked, plunging the world into a new Dark Age with people living in small villages trying to eke out ways to survive. There are true-breeding humans, but also plenty of different mutants with strange powers inhabiting the world, as well as malicious, dangerous creatures spawned by the atomic holocaust. The system provides lots of room for fantastic adventures.

I recall Tom tried to get several groups of GW players organized, and I played in at least one session with him. But role players were hard to find in Southbridge back then, and I don't think his wife was really happy about any kind of role playing games, particularly if they took Tom away from the house for a game session even once a week, let alone having strangers come into their home to play there.

I read Joe Green's article on future ethics with both interest and curiosity. Ethics and the human race have been reasonably consistent companions for most of the time civilizations have been in existence. Mores about things like murder, incest, stealing, respect for marriage rites,

these have been generally accepted by most human societies. Beyond that, there are plenty of variations and exceptions to any code of ethics you might care to name. The fact that the Babylonian Code of Laws seems pretty much in line with modern jurisprudence may be more than a coincidence, since civilization, by the very process of creating a society where many people interact with one another for their own livelihoods and at the same time producing for the common welfare of all, automatically generates commonsense similarities. If property is something most people work to achieve, then laws protecting property are a reasonable norm. Stealing the handiwork of another person's labor will almost always be against the laws and ethical system of most civilizations.

Had Joe stuck to ethics, the title of the essay, I would have little to comment on. However, he strays almost immediately into the field of future prediction, and has decided that human beings in the future (HP as he says), will automatically think and behave for the common overall good of society, rather than advancing their own private desires.

This is patently ridiculous. Nothing in the history of the human race has shown that this attitude has ever been prevalent or ever will be in the future. Somehow expecting that the next hundred years will completely change the basic fabric of the human personality that has evolved over the past eight million years is laughable. His conjectures are utopian wishful thinking.

Human beings are perfectly capable of pulling together and uniting, dedicated to working for the common good, but this is invariably due to a pending crisis, generally warfare, but sometimes major natural disasters. Believing that people will automatically put the good the society and other people ahead of their own selfish self-interest is pure fantasy.

In fact, I also question the first premise he asserts---that education will become wider and more universal in the future, or that education will automatically have a moderating influence on basic human greed and cruelty. If that were true, then the 20th century, which saw enormous advances in popular education at all levels in the western world, would never have developed Nazism, Fascism, or Stalinist style Communism. World Wars 1 and II and the Korean War, or any of the other horrific wars of that century would never have taken place, because well educated people would have realized that mutual co-operation for the common good is beneficial to both society as a whole and the individual within that society, and that wars do more than kill people, they suck up vast amounts of resources and wreck the economic systems of winners and losers alike.

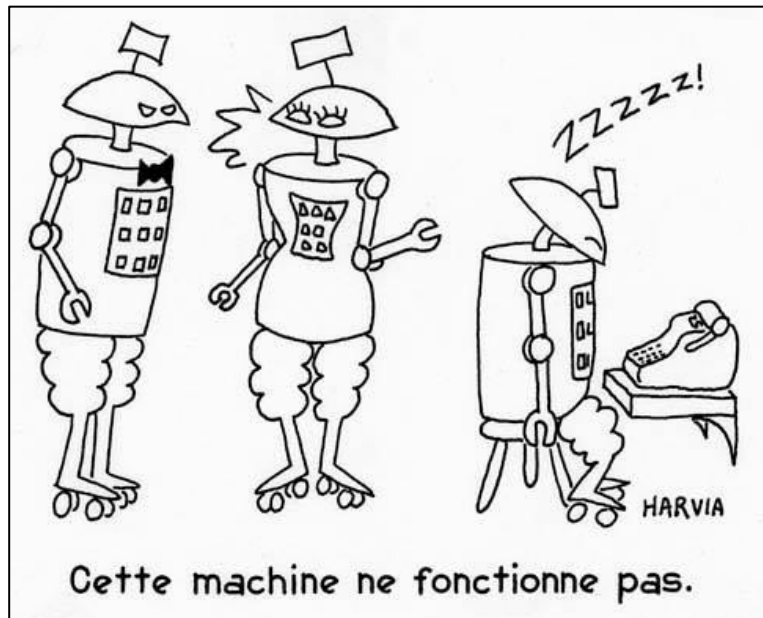
Obviously that did not happen. It isn't happening right now, where well educated people are using their education to figure out ways to enrich themselves despite the damage they do to their fellow man or the weakening of the social protections modern society is supposed to provide for all. The people who voted for Trump would rather have a tax break right now, and a chance to exploit their business models without government interference, than worry about the future.

If Joe's premise were correct, those people currently wreaking havoc on the environment and the business systems would automatically recognize that destroying economic safety nets now and gutting environmental protection regulations will lead to economic and environmental disaster only a few short years in the future. But they don't. Live high, steal what you can, kick the guy below you on the ladder of success in the face and forget about tomorrow. That's the modern-day philosophy, and you know, that's pretty much been the philosophy of the individual HP for most of the time our species has been in existence. And human nature is not going to change in the next hundred years, no matter how much Joe or any other idealist might hope otherwise.

I have to say a few words about Tom Rasley's articles contrasting the original Flash Gordon serials with *Star Wars*. Yes, there are strong similarities, but hardly the ones Tom lists. George Lucas has said many times he is a fan of the old motion picture serials, and that he originally set up the *Star Wars* movies as being chapters of a multi-part serial, except there would be no cliff-hangers after the end of each movie as in the original chapter-plays. There would be plot and theme consistency, with the story continuing onward toward a final conclusion. Of course, making modern movies that run a couple of hours each or longer takes a

lot more time and money than making the original serial chapters that ran twenty-two minutes or less each, so things sort of bogged down over the (many) years of the Star Wars franchise.

It would also be useful if Tom were more acquainted with serial movie making or the Flash Gordon serials themselves. First off, the original serial was titled *Flash Gordon*, released in 1936. It was promoted by Universal at the time as the most expensive sound serial ever made. It was a deliberate attempt to lure the adult audience that had been the primary supporter of movie serials during the 19teens and the first half of the 1920s, back into the theaters again. In this effort the studio was pretty much successful. It was booked everywhere, including many venues that had not run a serial since Pearl White's last chapter-play in



1924. The *Flash Gordon* serial was the second highest grossing release Universal had that year (a semi-musical starring radio darling Deanna Durbin came in first).

“Spaceship” (renamed as “Space Soldiers” in the 1950s for TV release), was a condensation of that serial down to about 80 minutes, intended to be distributed to those theaters that refused to run serials of any kind. If I were going to contrast any of the three Flash Gordon serials with *Star Wars*, I’d go with the first one, and I’d go with it as a serial, not the condensed version. I’ve actually seen *Star Wars* in b&w and it still holds up

just as well as in color. For those Gen-Xers who can’t bare the thot of seeing anything in b&w, the Flash Gordon serials, all of them, have been colorized. I think they are better in b&w, but I’m a purist when it comes to serials.

I enjoyed many other articles in this issue, but find I have no special comments. I echo Larry Montgomery’s relief that he didn’t have to kill the Japanese protester when they stormed his air force base. Killing somebody in combat is entirely different front shooting somebody making a protest.

Rich Dengrove’s article on magic grimoires was good reading. I note his comments that translations of these supposed magical books were often made poorly; that copies were often transcribed with mistakes left intact and some new ones added, and that many people interested in contacting demons made up stuff on the fly when they wrote or tried out those tomes. Considering the potential dangers that might develop if an error was made, I personally would have wanted the spells to be absolutely accurate down to the last crossed T and comma. I think some of the efforts of the Catholic Church to codify and sort the wheat from the chaff with their own authorized editions of magical tomes such as “The Original Grimoire of Pope Honorius III” were to sort out the so-called “angelic” power magic and clamp down on the supposed magical books that relied on demonic spells and power. Either way I personally have no interest in contacting any kind of demon, with or without magical protection.

So far as your article about your dreams---I’m sure they were fascinating to you, but a person’s dreams are entirely personal, and they usually bore the hell out of everybody else. That was certainly the case here for me anyway.

Good issue, packed with stuff. Look forward to the next one.

Murray Moore
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Our respective residences are 20 hours of non-stop driving, and one border crossing, apart. *Challenger 41* is a shorter bridge between us.

Glorious way to put it. Thus the value of fandom!

I am prejudiced toward what, nose raised, I call real art, handmade art, i.e. no pixels. I make a big exception for Brad Foster's cartoons, the lettering, the colouring, the ideas, the shapes; a fine example is "Rosy's Inner Robot" on this bacover.

I reprint Brad's brilliant portrait herein, because of my theme and because I love the picture and the subject.

A measure of an artist is that an artist's work can be identified from a distance, no need to peer at the signature. I can ID a Brad Foster across a room.

I am comfortable inside glass-walled elevators. I am comfortable standing close to the edge of a long drop, better to see the view. As a youngster I rode an alarming ride during the annual Canadian National Exhibition. That experience was enough. The ride car sped into corners and violently made turns. My memory suggests the ride was the Wild Mouse. The closest in name in 2017 at the CNE is the Crazy Mouse Roller Coaster <https://theex.com/main/rides/adult-rides/cne-classics> . I see that 2017 is the 90th anniversary of the Tilt-A-Whirl.

Rich Lynch and I are live-theatre opposites. Rich likes musicals. I prefer dramas and comedies in small theatres, theatres in which I can sit close to see expression on the actors' faces. Visual effects are not in the budgets of these plays, resulting in text-driven stories about characters.

I've seen big production musicals I've enjoyed from the balcony and small dramas that moved and delighted me from the orchestra – examples, Show Boat and Find Your Way Home, respectively. Closeness matters little, though: I sat in the back row for Moon for the Misbegotten and Jason Robards' performance practically blasted me out of the theatre.

But I have seen and enjoyed a production of *Urinetown*. And I liked, in the previous century, the short-lived TV show created by otherwise-successful Steve Bochco, *Cop Rock* (1990, 11 episodes). During each episode, between commercials, the characters stopped to sing a song.

I am 65 but still too young to have attended Saturday movie matinees featuring serials. Anyway I grew up in a village of 1,200 and my village's movie theatre was closed; in retrospect, remarkable that a movie theatre ever existed in my village. Tom Rasely makes a compelling comparison in "Is Flash Gordon My Father?" I am reading *Challenger* (aside from the covers) in black & white.

I have been to Los Angeles only once, earlier this year in fact, to attend Corflu. Mary Ellen and I both like architecture but our only off-site trip from the Corflu hotel in Woodland Hills was to the home of an art collector who gave us a tour of his collection. I have checked the long table of contents of *The Essential Ellison* (Nemo Press, 1987): "Demon With A Glass Hand" is not included.

The genealogist in our family is my only sibling, my older sister. Thanks to her I can append the letters U.E. after my name. I have a certificate stating that I am a descendant of United Empire Loyalists. I would be an American if a Quaker ancestor had not been encouraged to leave your country.

My ancestor Jeremiah Moore lived on a farm near his grandfather Andrew Moore, in what is now Pennsylvania Dutch country. Jeremiah was seen as too friendly with the losing side in your Revolution. The family's farm animals and household goods were seized by patriots. Jeremiah, his pregnant wife, their children, with one horse, walked for two months, the height of Pennsylvania, north/ northwest through Upper New York State, and crossed the Niagara River. They stopped in present-day Ontario in November, 1786.

Milt Stevens prefers small cons and mentions teenagers. The recent, as I type, Worldcon, Worldcon 75 in Helsinki, sold (supporting plus attending) 8,748 memberships; of that number, 5,944 attended. <http://www.worldcon.fi/whos-coming/membership-statistics/>

Of the 8,748 memberships, a whopping 2,041 memberships were purchased by persons attending their first Worldcon.

Lloyd Penney says Worldcons are too expensive. Worldcons are increasingly happening outside the United States: 2014, London; 2017, Helsinki; 2019, Dublin; 2020, New Zealand (unless the New Zealand bid implodes).

Europeans who helped make Loncon so crowded, I suggest, have the Worldcon bug and will support in large numbers any European country bid.

France? French fans did not have a presence in Helsinki that I noticed despite a French bid for 2023. Chinese fans had a table: a China bid will be forthcoming I predict, for a year in the 2020s.

Worldcon, as well as next year, will be in the United States in 2021, in Washington. Why? Because the most recent U.S. Worldcon east of the Mississippi River was a fannish generation ago, Noreascon 4 in 2004. (Forget that I predicted this year's Worldcon would be in Washington.) Also Washington currently is the lone bidder for 2021. And Worldcon will be back in Chicago in 2022: the only other 2022 bid is for Doha, Qatar.

Percentage of attending memberships by country for Helsinki, top three: Finland, 35% ; U.S., 23% ; U.K., 13 %.

^^^

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I was first dubious about themed issues, but I got into the swing of the demons in us all in the latest *Challenger*. Did you stretch things? You have to fit essays by different people into a single issue. I think you did it just fine. I don't know whether my *Journal of Mind Pollution* ever has a theme, though. I am always going in several different tracks at once.

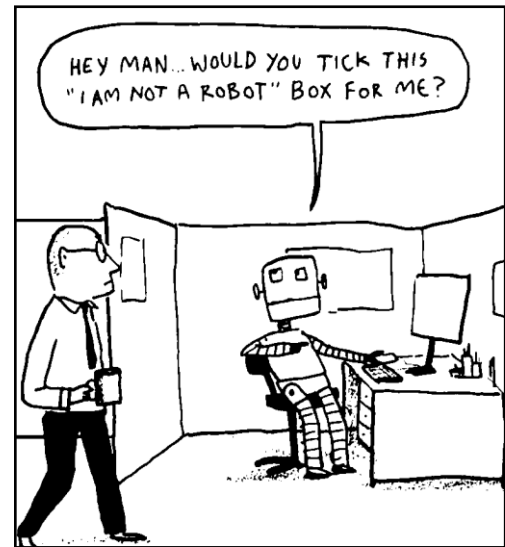
I, of course, first wish to comment on my own essay, "The Grimoires". It concerns demons people used to try to call for various less than savory enterprises. They did it with books called grimoires. When and where did this essay first appear? I imagine it's several decades old. I can't say that it all builds up to a logical point. No, it doesn't. However, I like it because it gives you the flavor of grimoires and the views of the people who used them. Today, I could add something to it. Recently, I have arrived at a conclusion about the 13th Century grimoire "The Constitution of Honorius," Evidence has convinced me that the true author worked in the Vatican; and, from the magical operations, you could tell a lot about his clientele. Lots of prelates were at wits end because they could not have a vision of God.

Having dispensed with demons of the book, I will go to demons of the mind, specifically of our dreams. The first essay of this *Challenger*, you wrote; and it concerned your dreams. Hell! Your nightmares. I remember nightmares when I was a kid. The monster is just about to get me and I'm running as fast as I can. However, he's catching up. Then I wake up. Those days are past. I don't remember dreams like that anymore. What I remember is my car was across the street. When I crossed the street to get to it, however, it had disappeared. I said to myself: hey, this must be a dream, and woke up. In short, becoming an adult has taken all the excitement out of life.

The next essay concerns another demon, the metaphorical demons, Dr. Edward Teller. There is science fantasy and actual scientists. In a science fantasy, he would be a villain, who can be metaphorically transformed into a demon. However, in the real world, he was a human being with many good points. In fact, with a high intelligence. Just that fate set him against what a lot of people hold dear. That fits a lot of personages known as demons. Humans who are real demons are more often below the radar.

My only question is whether General Groves fit another stereotype, the incompetent? Why did he choose the diffusion method rather the centrifuge method? I think the diffusion method was making uranium into plutonium for a bomb rather than the centrifuge method, sifting uranium 235 from less amenable uranium isotopes. We read about Dr. Teller's motives, but we don't read about General Groves'.

In addition to there being demons from hell, demons of our dreams, and demons of metaphor, there are demons of suspense and demons of horror. I recently obtained the movie *Curse of the Demon*, which Jim Ivers reviews. It was not without its action scenes. However, what predominated was suspense. What typified this is that you would not see the demon. The star Dana Andrews and the



director Jacques Tourneur fought the producer to not show the demon at all. They were ultimately turned down, and the demon had to be seen once. In short, the demon there was not a demon of suspense but almost a demon of suspense. Not perfection; but not like these days, where horror means action, weird sights and splatter. Often there is not any build up to the horror scenes at all. In short, the movie demons these days are all horror.

In addition to having the suspense and horror, we have satirical demons, in Mike Resnick's "Visitors' Night at Joey Chicago's" He uses them to ask the question: which is worse, the cure or the disease? He reaches the conclusion that it depends on your perspective. Of course, what he writes about is not a case of germs or viruses, it is a matter of magic and demons. Nonetheless, he is right. If you wish to get rid of annoyances, make sure the cure is worse. Hey, if it is your worst enemy who is sick, you might want him to die. ... Take that, Kim Jong Un!

Having made all the comments about the articles concerning demons, no matter how farfetched, I will comment on two articles which steadfastly refused to concern demons. No one was even trying to do it in a farfetched manner. I am talking about Tom Rasely "Flash Gordon IS My Father" and Taral Wayne's "Its Fifty-Year Mission".

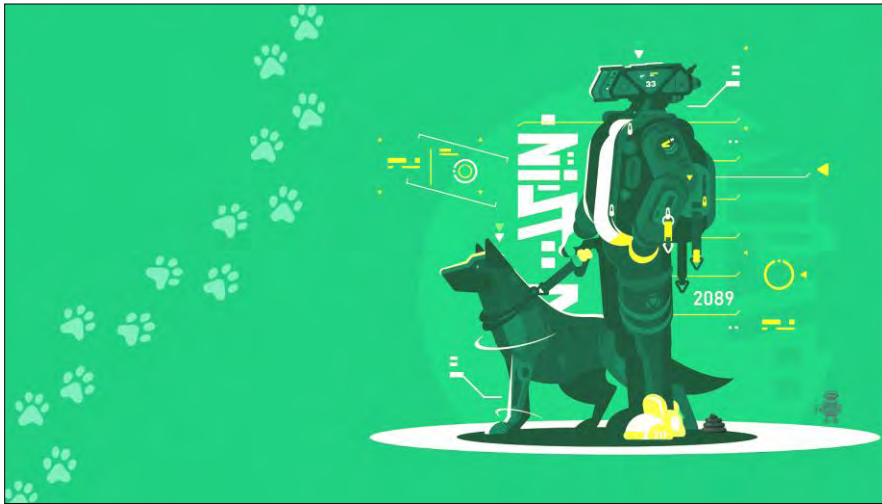
First, I will discuss Tom Rasely's article, which is about movies we remember from our childhood. Tom Rasely proves that the inspiration for a lot of scenes in *Star Wars* come from the Buster Crabbe *Flash Gordon* and *Buck Rogers* serials. It shows what a talented filmmaker like Lucas could do with badly written films probably meant for children. For instance, I know how to get out of jail in the *Flash Gordon* serial. You whistle for the guard and then hit him on the head. At least, that's how I remember it when I saw one as an adult. Mercifully, such tactics are absent in *Star Wars*. Of course, Lucas picked and chose the virtues of such productions. I lack his creativity because I, as a child and adult, missed them.

Next, among the demon irrelevant articles was Taral Wayne's "Its Fifty-Year Mission." Taral disliked *Star Trek* (2009) because it concerned *Star Trek* past rather than *Star Trek* future,. I liked the two actors in *Star Trek* (2009) who played the young Kirk and Spock, Chris Pine and Zachary Quinto. They really looked; and, despite the script, acted like the younger Kirk and Spock. Of course, if he wants to get me on the plot, he's welcome. Time travel tales usually crash on the rocks of paradoxes.

I think the two space films are about it for non-demon material in a zine that mostly concerned demons. It is just as well, Guy, you didn't try to turn them into tomes concerning demons. You went far afield enough on demons as you could. No question the articles about demons of the book, the demons of suspense and horror, and demons of satire are about demons. The demons of the mind and metaphor are more metso. In fact, I am surprised there aren't any gremlins, the demons in the machine.

EDITORIAL NOTES

Below: a genuine ad for a robot Super-Duper Pooper Scooper.



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“The Shadow of Alfred Bester” is copyright 2017 by Anthony Tollin. In

case you'd care to listen to one of *The Shadow* old-time-radio cast reunions that Anthony Tollin directed (in 1986) ... starring John Archer, Lesley Woods, Dwight Weist, Les Tremaine and **Andre Baruch** ... **actual** story begins 10 minutes into recording. Script by Alfred Bester! Contact http://sperdvac.com/samples/SPERDVAC_Presents_86-11-08_Shadow_recreation.mp3

Rich Lynch asks that I note that the except from the song “Mr. Roboto” is © 1983 by Dennis DeYoung and Wixon Music OBO Stygian Songs.

Chris Garcia reports on his employer: “Here's the day-ta! *[No ... here he is!]* The Computer History Museum (<http://computerhistory.org>) is based in Mountain View, CA. Founded in 1979 as the Digital Computer Museum in Marlboro, MA, then re-named The Computer Museum in Boston, the Computer History Museum is the largest collection of historic computers, software, documentation, ephemera, and audio-video materials. It is also a major holder of science fiction-related material, from robots, first editions of *RUR*, signed Isaac Asimov materials, the Moskowitz collection of SF novels, and various pieces of science fiction-themed computer art.”

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Battle of the Toy Robots

John Purcell

A long time ago in a playroom far, far away...

All good fan articles start with a catchy opening line that plays off a popular **movie**. But that's not important right now. What is important is the theme of this issue of *Challenger*: robots.



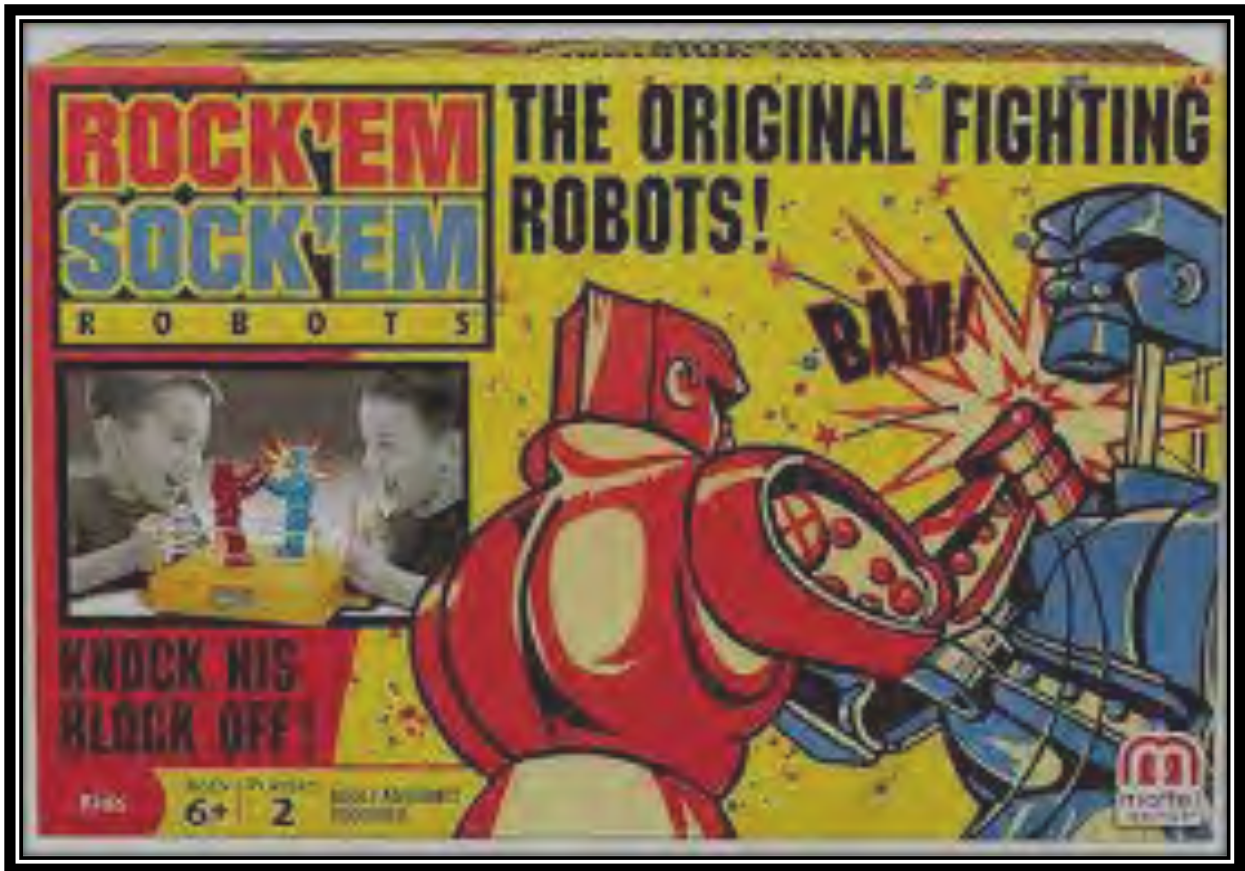
Let me start off with a few statements of fact. One, I am no technophile and thus don't know much about the inner workings about robots. Two, I am well aware of Asimov's Three Laws of Robotics, and thoroughly enjoyed reading all of the R. Daneel Olivaw books (yes, I have them all on the bookshelf). And three, I have a grandson. That means he has toys. Lots and lots of toys, including robots.

He is not alone in having toy robots, either. I have one of my own: a Robby the Robot, proudly displayed in a case alongside six DVD's of 1950s sci-fi movies. When I first got this boxed set I took out Robby and used the wind-up key on his back, and off Robby toddled, waving his arms completely out of synch with his wobbly walking legs. So cool! Ever since then he has been back in his display case, where he overlooks the living room from the top of the shelving units holding the bulk of my science fiction book collection. In the grandkids' room are toy shelves, and there are a couple of other robotic toys, notably a remote controlled robot dog that will sit and yap at the touch of a button on the control box. Brian likes that, plus the transformer robots stored in a tub.

Just last month during his little sister's second birthday party, my grandson received a gift that really brought back memories: a Rock 'em, Sock 'em Robot game. It was exactly like the one I had when I was ten or eleven – the first version debuted in 1964 from Marx Toy Company – except Brian's is smaller in size, or at least it looks smaller than the one I had umpty-ump decades ago. The boxing ring the Red Rocker and Blue Bomber are mounted in even looks real, and the controller is much sturdier, too: however, it is only a matter of time – a week or three, possibly more – before my five-year-old grandson destroys it in battle.

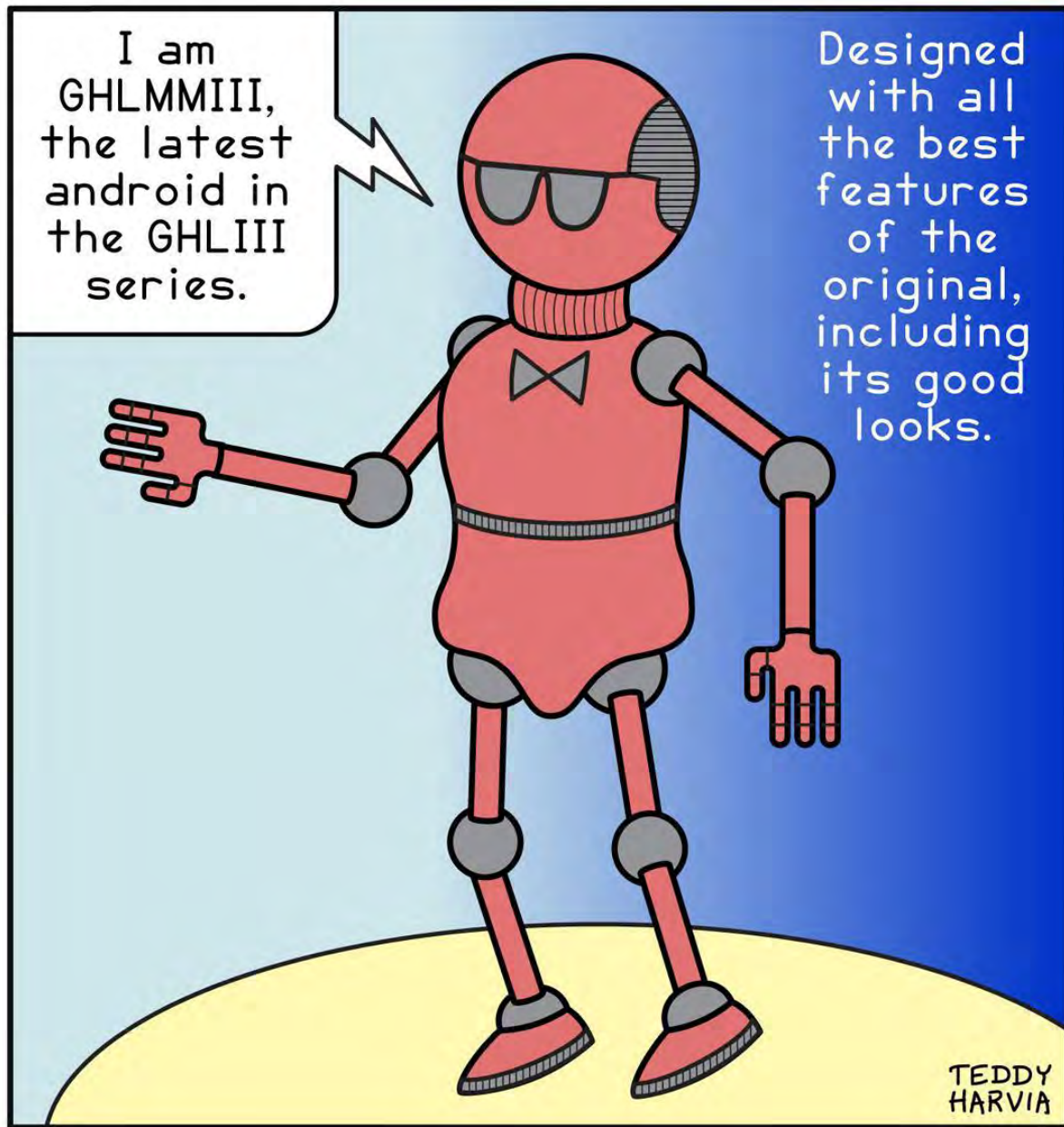
Naturally, I had to play against him. Since his favorite color is “bwue”, I let Brian handle the Blue Bomber while I commanded the Red Rocker. For those of you who have never played this very simple game, the object is to knock the head off your opponent. Well, it doesn’t go flying completely off, but if you angle the uppercut just right by pushing the correct plunger button down, your bot’s right or left hand will connect with your opponent’s chin and “clack!” the head comes up off its shoulders. Brian very quickly got the hang of using the jab and uppercut control buttons, at one point his Blue Bomber knocking the block off my Red Rocker six times in a row. The kid’s a natural.

So I will let more scientifically minded fans write about artificial intelligence, the socio-economic effects of robots and AI in the workplace, and programming robots – I am sure someone will write about the sex robots being developed in Japan for this issue - and such, but for this granddad, I have a rematch set for next weekend.



Well, Mr. L, Ms. L has told me a time or two that she thinks I'm a living doll, but my goodness, is *that* what she meant?





So we here we are the end of another challenging *Challenger*. Robots galore, with great contributors, but our subject of SF and AI is barely nudged. I think of *Westworld*, *Humans*, robots in the comics (*Metal Men*, *Magnus: Robot Fighter*, Robotman of the Doom Patrol in *My Greatest Adventure*, all the variant *Superman robots*) ... *lots o'stuff!* But **that's the strength of science fiction** – its enormous, indeed all-but-infinite scope. Thanks to all for their help, thanks most to *la belle* Rose-Marie for making this – **despite Teddy's hilarious illo and Brad Foster's, on the next page** – the most human of lives. To her we leave the last word ...

GHLIII

“So long, farewell, auf Wiedersehen, adieu...”

(...from one of Guy's least favorite musicals—to see his favorites, check out Mike Resnick's consideration of the art form on page 47.)

And so we wrap up another challenging *Challenger*. Our wonderful contributors were up to the task—and then some—of contemplating the meaning of robotics now and in the future.

But still we are left with the same lingering questions:

What is consciousness?

What does it mean to be human?

There is a field of study gaining traction that addresses just such issues, “**robotic psychology**,” with practitioners in the field now being referred to as “**robo-psychologists**.”

The relationship between us and our mechanical doppelgangers may not be the only thing we need to consider—robots affect how we interact with each other.

As Guy said above, we have barely touched the surface. We can look forward to the artists among us exploring these questions and others as AI advances into the future.

But in the near future, I look forward to seeing you in the next issue of *Challenger*!

Rose-Marie Lillian

