

PLANET FINGER

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AW

CHALLENGER 43

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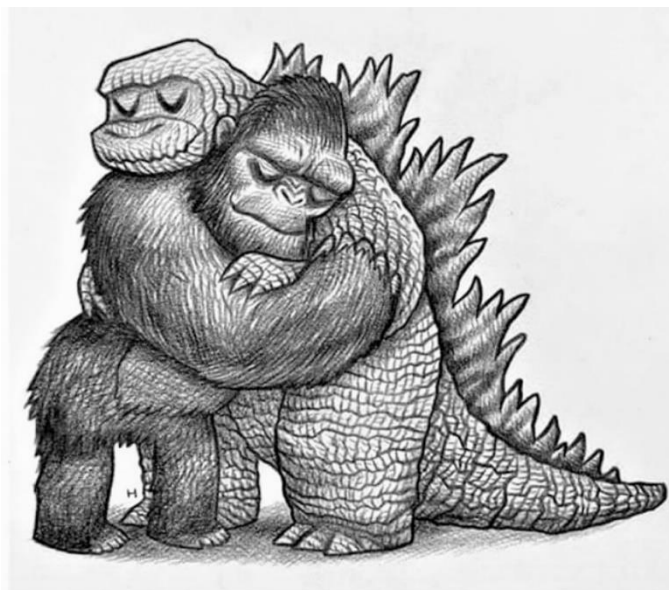
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"What's Shakin'?"

The CHALLENGER welcome

What's shakin' was my left hand, and it had been doing so throughout early 2022. An unconscious quaver that I could stop with a thought ... but which would return when I thought about anything else. Out of caution, I told my doctor about the shaking, and he sent me to a neurologist, an Indian lady with a mile-long name and a no-bullshit manner. She put me through the diagnostic paces – follow her fingertip with my eyes, walk up and down a corridor, let her play Annie Wilkes and whack my knees and ankles with a hammer – and found no other symptoms. So she sent me to get a **DaTscan exam**.



This test involved my being shot up with radioactive dye and subsequently parked in an MRI-like mechanism that would take images of what passes for my brain. It's called a single-photon emission computed tomography (SPECT) device. Unlike the MRI, no monster magnets threatened to pull metal from my teeth, and there was little noise – none of the various deafening clanks and bangs that rattle your wits in the MRI. In fact, it was such a peaceful experience that I fell asleep.

The next day I got the call. Hand tremors can either be symptomatic of **Parkinson's Disease**, the ailment signifying loss of dopamine and motor control, or **essential**, which is a natural product of aging. As I was then only 27, that would be unlikely, but if I were 72, say, it would make sense. We hoped that essentiality would rule. It did not. I have Parkinson's.

Shock, when it hits, isn't predictable. In my case there was no immediate panic or freak-out. I felt a bit numb. I remembered fandom's beloved Roger Sims. I thought of brave Michael J. Fox. I remembered the amazing Muhammad Ali when I met him in 1975, shortly before the Thrilla in Manila ... and how Parkinson's drained him later. I let one word fall upon me, truly like a shroud. *Mortality*.

I ordered books on the disease and tried to figure it out. Interestingly, Parkinson himself wasn't a researcher, just a GP who noticed that some people on the street walked funny. What causes the disease? Parkinson didn't know and no one since has figured it out. (Sunspots, maybe.) I paid the doctor a second visit, and she sent me to a second neurologist, an expert in Parkinson's. Their mutual advice: *Exercise. Live your life*.

Part of "living your life" was taking a gifted trip to France, England and Scotland with Rosy, a life which I've written up in my multi-part *Iconic Route*, posted on eFanzines.com. I hope you read it, or at least eye the photos. Another part is getting back into congoing, which *la belle* and I did this fall by attending the 60th DeepSouthCon, a smallish but fulfilling relaxacon in Huntsville which brought us back into contact with some of our forever people. Finally, "living your life" for a fan editor incorporates *pubbing one's ish*, so here's *Challenger* #43, a jumbled issue of

oddities and ends, but the first in more than three years. It features poetry, fiction, articles on witchcraft and film, a glimpse into the life of a species-wide hero, personal reflection and literary analysis. That it contains so much and is still the shortest *Challenger* in decades is ... well, it just *is*, isn't it?

As you see, #43 is *not* the *Challenger* that has long been promised. When I committed myself to this issue at the end of 2021 – by giving the zine its GHLIII Press Pub number; that's how I roll – I thought I would have time and energy and wit to research and bring forth a special Theodore Sturgeon number. I commissioned – bummed, actually – a fine cover from the brilliant and generous Alan White, bought Sturgeon's entire *oeuvre*, started collecting critical pieces, and discovered that however joyous an experience it is to immerse oneself in Sturgeon's work, there is a *lot* to it.

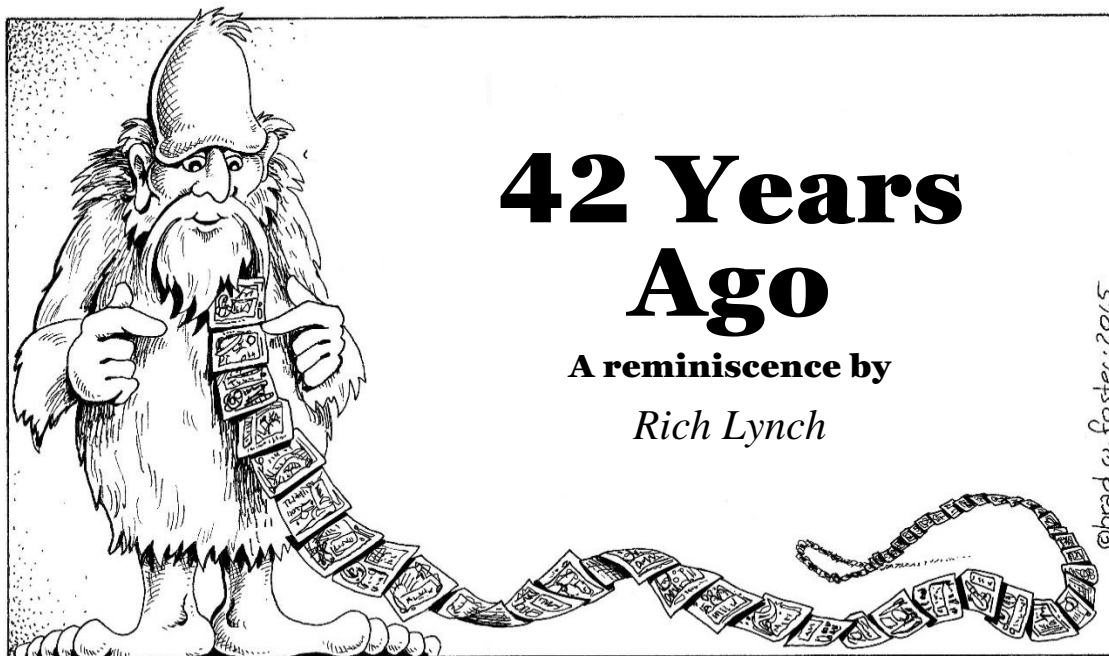
That was over a year ago, and I admit to my shame that I wasted the time. I could blame COVID, since the pandemic effectively gutted the state college where I'd been teaching and there was no work – but that only gave me more free time. I could whine that somehow my circadian rhythms have gone berserk and I couldn't sleep, but that only made me anxious and addle-brained ... no impediment to fanac *kof*. I could point with astonishment at the sheer mass of material I have to read and frame – not only the novels and 13 volumes of stories, but reviews and articles and anecdotes and TV/radio scripts and and and ... Finally, I could grouse that the contributor I was counting on to anchor the Sturgeon issue – with a uniquely personal view of the great writer – was having serious second thoughts. *Would it be fair, she thought, to write about a man in so deeply personal a fashion when his family might read it?* Since I love and trust this person, I left the decision to her – where it still rests.

So I must take more time – lots more time – to form the *Challenger* that was meant to be. Instead, here's the *Challenger* that *is*, composed of odds and ends and this and that ... a themeless issue which I hope you enjoy, nonetheless. I'm grateful to the contributors, Joe Green and Greg Benford and Jim Ivers and Riches Dengrove and Lynch. Special mention must go to Justin E.A. Busch, who passed away before his article here could be printed. I never met Justin, but he was *of* this madness; editor of an excellent sercon zine, *Far Journeys*, he was becoming a stalwart in the fanzine hobby. Thanks also to, and of course, *tou jours, la belle*.

Let's get it done.



But first, a special note. **Mike Resnick** was the consummate *Chall* Pal. I don't believe any of our 42 previous issues went forth without a hilarious and reveling Resnick article. As I said when he died, though Mike was a fine professional and an able fan, foremost he was a *friend*. He is and will always be an absence painfully felt. Life hasn't been and will never be the same without him, and neither will *Challenger*.



Those of you who know me are probably aware that I grew up in a part of the country (northern New York State) where being frugal was an ingrained part of one's psyche. There were some wealthy people, sure, but many if not most of the inhabitants lived pretty much paycheck-to-paycheck, my parents included. I am proud to say that they were open-minded and liberal about many things (they were registered Democrats in a Republican part of the state), but wastefulness was not one of them. As a result of this upbringing, all my life I've been hesitant to be rid of stuff that I thought might one day be useful. As I've grown older I'd like to think that I've at least partly cured myself of this, but there are still boxes of decades-old fanzines and convention memorabilia to be found on various shelves and in a few closets around the house. And, it turns out, a lot of them do have historical value.

So there I was, sorting through things that could be worth digitally preserving at the **fanac.org** fanhistory website, when I came

across a bunch of name badges from science fiction conventions that Nicki and I had attended a very long time ago. And one of them brought back a lot of memories – it was from Midsouthcon '80, which had been held in Huntsville, Alabama in the summer of 1980.

Back then, Nicki and I were pretty active in science fiction fandom. The Chattanooga Science Fiction Association had formed a few years earlier and we were publishing its monthly newszine *Chat*, which served as a focal point for the organization. The club held monthly meetings at the local university and some of its members, Nicki and I included, attended regional science fiction conventions held within a reasonable drive from Chattanooga. And there were a lot of them. What made me take notice of the badge for Midsouthcon '80 was the overt use of the Confederate battle flag as part of its design. Can't do that now, of course, but back then that flag had not yet been hijacked by white nationalist racists. Far from it, actually – a Wikipedia article, for example, indicates that during the decades of the 1960s



and 1970s two left-leaning activist and anti-racist organizations, the Southern Student Organizing Committee and the Young Patriots Organization, had used images of the Confederate flag in their emblems. And in the action-comedy television show *The Dukes of Hazard*, a fixture of the CBS prime time broadcast schedule from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, the Confederate flag was a prominent part of the paint scheme on 'General Lee', the automobile that was an iconic image of the show.

My memories of the first half of 1980 are that it was a somewhat turbulent period for me. I had not been happy with my job in the chemicals industry and had applied for a career-changing position at a U.S. Government-owned energy agency (the Tennessee Valley Authority). But there had been all kinds of delays before the TVA job was finally offered to me and in the meantime my industry job was becoming dicier as time progressed – a new boss, one who didn't seem to think very much of me, had set me up to fail with arbitrarily tight deadlines and inadequate resources for a project which had been assigned to me. There had been a lot of stress and I remember that when I received a letter with the TVA offer, the week before Midsouthcon '80, it had felt like a huge load had been lifted off my shoulders.

As a result, Midsouthcon was a pleasant

weekend among friends. The convention itself was a good one, with invited guests (Kelly Freas, Fred Pohl, and Bob Tucker) who were informative and entertaining. And there was even a legacy: the convention turned out to be one-off, but it did serve as a focal point around which a thriving Huntsville fandom came into being. The North Alabama Science Fiction Association formed soon afterward and a couple of years after that the first of Huntsville's Con*Stellation annual science fiction conventions was held. Nicki and I met

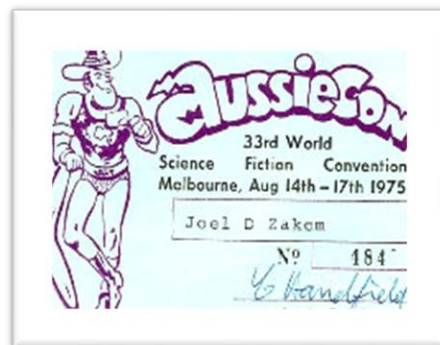
several Huntsville neo-fans that weekend, some of whom were attending their first science fiction convention, and there was one who stood out in my memory – an energetic teenager named Toni Weisskopf. I wonder what became of her after that...

It all happened 42 years ago and in some ways the year 1980 was the end of an era. The very next year Chattanooga fandom was fractured by dissention which led to the end of *Chat* and dis-involvement with the Chattanooga fan community by Nicki and me. We still went to conventions, but except for a few good friends we were never very

close to most of the Chattanooga fans after that. A lot of them are no longer living, including the chair of Midwestcon '80, Andy Purcell. He had actually lived much closer to Huntsville than Chattanooga, which I guess explains why the convention was held there.

But after Midsouthcon ended he mostly quit coming to fan events.

Hey, fan history is where you find it! In this instance it was lurking among a bunch of convention name badges. I wonder what memories will surface in the *next* batch of stuff I look through.





Forward into the Past:

A Brief (Cinematic)
History of the Future,
Part 2

by *Jim Ivers* Illo by the author

**"Who controls the past controls the future.
Who controls the present controls the past."** --
1984 by George Orwell

In this precarious time of destabilizing economic problems and possible related food shortages, I half-expect our blundering leaders to simply give up and announce: "Tuesday is Soylent Green Day". (That is, if the hideous insect-based foods currently in development fail to catch on.) The fact that the 1973 film version of *Soylent Green* is set in the year 2022 does not inspire confidence. New York City is depicted as a filthy, lawless hellhole teeming with ragged homeless people (not at all like it is today). But this survey, however, is not about finger-wagging tales of doom and gloom. (For films of that ilk,

one can screen *THX 1138*, *The Omega Man*, *Z.P.G.* (Zero Population Growth), *A Boy and His Dog*, *Logan's Run*, *Damnation Alley*, the *Mad Max* and *Hunger Games* series, et al.)

In the first part of this study (see *Challenger* #38), we looked at *Metropolis* (1927), *Just Imagine* (1930), *World Without End* (1956), *Beyond the Time Barrier* (1960), *The Creation of the Humanoids* (1962), *The Time Travelers* (1964), *Wild Wild Planet*, *Cyborg 2087*, *Fahrenheit 451*, *Way Way Out* (all 1966), *Moon Zero Two* (1969), and *Blade Runner* (1982). These films were selected because they share a vision -- despite grim situations, social critiques, and some pointed satire -- that offers at least a glimmer of hope for the future.

This second part adds a few stragglers to the above list and also expands on the previous, sketchy assessment of *Things to Come* as well as the history of science fiction films in England.

At this juncture, it's also worth reiterating that these futuristic fables are all, in whole or in part, allegories. Either by accident or (more often) by design, these narratives take present-day issues and exaggerate their long-term effects in the alternate reality of a possible future. This serves the dual purpose of making the story feel relatable, if not topical, to the audience, while providing a platform for cautionary or satirical statements about our society and where it's heading.

Utopian Dreams: Science as Savior

Things to Come (U.K., 1936) - Based on the prophetic novel *The Shape of Things to Come* (1933) by H.G. Wells, this was directed by William Cameron Menzies. This landmark of bold design and ambitious storytelling is a bit cold and aloof, but it's still highly impressive on a technical level.

Set in the city of Everytown in southern England, war breaks out on Christmas Day, 1940. The city is largely destroyed by a devastating bomb attack. An extraordinary prediction considering that Germany began bombing London in July 1940.

After a montage of stock war footage (which looks dated except for a few shots of sleek, modern-looking tanks) we flash forward to 1966. A plague has killed off half of humanity and the war has finally subsided in an apparent stalemate. Civilization, now in ruins, has degenerated into small Feudal states. Everytown is now ruled by a petty warlord simply known as The Boss (Ralph Richardson).

We jump to 1970 where former resident John Cabal (Raymond Massey) returns to take control of the town as part of an overall plan to restore order and reunite the country. He represents Wings Over the World, a new world government made up of egghead scientists and engineers. Arriving in a fleet of enormous futuristic planes, they drop "peace gas" on the town to render The Boss and his army unconscious before parachuting down to the ground.

After a stirring speech by Cabal about the glories of technological progress, a montage of massive factories, mining operations, and gigantic machinery represents the ensuing decades before we cut to the year 2036. Everytown is now a glittering underground metropolis -- a triumph of intelligent social planning and scientific design. The expansive city center with its pod-like glass elevators and stacked layers of curving forms is a classic example of Streamline Moderne (a late form of Art Deco architecture). The avant-garde design anticipates the 1959 Guggenheim Museum as well as the futuristic lobbies of San Francisco's Hyatt Regency and New York's Marriott Marquis off Times Square.

The leader of this new city is Oswald Cabal, grandson of John Cabal. The story concludes with the launch of the first humans into space (using a peculiar giant "symbolic" cannon instead of a conventional rocket) as Cabal delivers a grand monologue about the noble destiny of Mankind.

Wells penned the script and insisted on micro-managing nearly every aspect of the film's production. For good or ill, it's his vision that ends up on screen. The story is marred by a detached, intellectual tone and a lack of character development. In Wells' stories, characters tend to be little more than symbolic figures used to

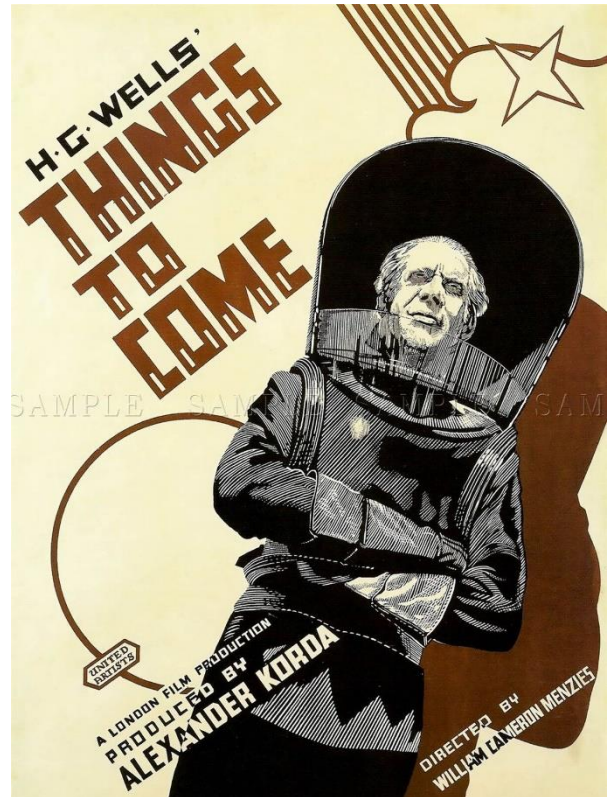
convey ideas. John and Oswald Cabal (both played by Raymond Massey) are given preachy-sounding speeches rather than naturalistic dialog. Plus, first-time director William Cameron Menzies allowed the stage-trained Massey and Ralph Richardson to give overly theatrical performances.

Critical quibbles aside, this is an intelligently written story that appeals to the mind rather than the heart. Unlike most other futuristic tales, the plot is not a vehicle for commenting on present-day issues (besides the threat of militarism). This is pure speculative fiction. Wells wanted to show an idealized society created and led by scientists rather than politicians and driven by the quest for knowledge, not greed and power.

Anarchy in the U.K.

As the dust settled at the end of the Second World War, a greatly diminished England was left to grapple with a serious case of postwar depression. The loss of empire, prestige, and national security -- overshadowed by the looming threat of Soviet aggression -- fostered a fatalistic obsession with totalitarianism. This anxiety is evident in a continual out-pouring of dystopian science fiction stories (many of which have been turned into movies and TV shows). Starting with two George Orwell film adaptations -- *Animal Farm* (1955) and *1984* (1956) -- this somber subgenre includes *It Happened Here* (a Nazi victory fable, 1965), *Fahrenheit 451* (adapted from an American novel, 1966), *Privilege* (a clever 1967 satire of conformity set in 1970), the horror anthology *Scream and Scream Again* (1970), *A Clockwork Orange* (1971, set in 1995), *1984* (a brutally depressing version released in 1984), and *Brazil* (1985), Terry Gilliam's 1984-inspired black comedy.

A more recent example is *V for Vendetta* (2006), a well-made screen adaptation of Alan Moore's 1982-85 comic -- I mean graphic novel. This presents a morally ambiguous story about an anarchist who uses brutal methods in his battle against yet another generic authoritarian state (reminiscent of *Scream and Scream Again*). Throughout the story, he rationalizes IRA-style bomb attacks (including blowing up the Houses of Parliament) by identifying with the 17th-



century revolutionary Guy Fawkes. A slick piece of entertainment, but much like *Starship Troopers*, it leaves the viewer with mixed feelings.

As for British television, the late Patrick McGoochan's *The Prisoner* series (1967) is a unique and brilliant meditation on individual freedom vs. the Surveillance State (which declares "We want information" in the opening of every episode). On an island prison for former spies, the titular hero refuses to reveal the reason for his resignation. The series anticipates today's password-protected society where the marketing of stolen personal information has become a billion-dollar industry.

There's little doubt that McGoochan would despise the world of today (and never mind that microchip in your phone that tracks your every move). For example, Sweden is currently testing out a tiny chip that's implanted in one's hand (in the fleshy area between thumb and index finger) that can be swiped over a sensor, replacing the need for credit cards, etc. (Will this miraculous new technology increase our freedom or will it be used to track and control us like a herd of sheep?)

Finally, there's the never-ending *Dr. Who* series (along with a pair of 1965-66 spin-off films starring Peter Cushing) that regularly features the extermination-happy Daleks, an alien race of totalitarian troublemakers inspired by the genocidal Nazis.

For the past quarter-century, these dark dramas have documented Britain's persistent fear of societal collapse – brought on by outside forces or an internal neo-fascist takeover -- and descent into an Orwellian nightmare.

The '60s and '70s: Style and Satire

After the end of the war in Europe, Italy also struggled through many years of economic and psychological depression. Similar to England's grim "kitchen sink" dramas of the same period, Italian cinema went through an extended "neorealist" phase. These tales of tragedy and sadness are well-represented by *The Bicycle Thief* (1949), *La Strada* (1954), *Nights of Cabiria* (1957), and *Two Women* (1960).

In the early '60s neorealism faded away as several new escapist genres became popular. There was the sudden rise of supernatural horror chillers (due to Mario Bava's highly influential *Black Sunday*), heroic sword-and-sandal epics, and science fiction adventures. Films in the latter group (*Assignment Outer Space*, 1960, *Battle of the Worlds*, 1961, *War of the Planets*, 1966, et al.) were initially run-of-the-rocketship imitations of American space sagas. Even Fellini shows his contempt for these movies in a funny segment in *8 1/2* (1963).

By mid-decade, the Italians stopped copying dull, deadly serious SF flicks from the U.S. and developed their own distinct brand of futurism. These were sleek, style-driven productions with flamboyant sets, mod

fashions, a camp sensibility (to varying degrees), plus some exotic sex appeal. This new, all-Italian aesthetic can be seen in Bava's *Planet of the Vampires* (1965), *Star Pilot* (1966), *Wild Planet* (1966, discussed in Part One), *Mission Stardust* (1967), and the next film in this survey.

The 10th Victim (Italy, 1965) - Directed by Elio Petri, this stars Marcello Mastroianni, Ursula Andress, and Elsa Martinelli.

It's hard to go wrong (or find fault) with a tale that opens with the perfectly proportioned Ursula Andress (clad in a barely-there silver costume), doing an exotic nightclub dance which ends with her spraying the place with bullets from her double-barreled bikini top. (This opener must have inspired the similarly armed fembots in *Austin Powers: International Man of Mystery*.) Add a lively, lighthearted narrative, some witty social satire, ultra-mod Euro-fashions, surreal set designs inspired by Pop Art, and you have a highly enjoyable romp worthy of a cult following.

Set in and around Rome in the near future, the story concerns a legal human hunting contest called The Big Hunt. Anticipating today's reality shows (*Survivor*, et al.), this is a popular televised event. The show has one major sponsor,

Ming Tea, and there are some funny jabs at advertising and commercialism along the way. Mastroianni plays a well-off but jaded contestant (and leader of a nutty sun worshipping cult) who is being hunted by Andress. To say more would give too much away.

Despite the presence of The Big Hunt, this vision of the future -- essentially, a mild spoof of rampant capitalism -- shows a mostly appealing and prosperous, albeit self-indulgent, society. (And if it were up to me, I'd put the



Italians in charge of designing the look and attitude of the future.) This is a stylish and sophisticated blend of romantic comedy and satire that holds up remarkably well. This gets my highest, must-see recommendation.

Sleeper (1973) - Some movies have an enduring quality while others become stale over time. I had fond memories of seeing this popular Woody Allen comedy on TV in the mid-'70s, and again a few years later at an outdoor screening at college. Four decades later, seeing it again was a surprisingly disappointing experience. The verbal humor felt forced and dated, and the slapstick bits came across as tired and uninspired. The only truly amusing moment was a kitchen scene where a package of instant pudding grows into a giant monster, a la *The Blob*.

The story is a comedic reworking of the old Buck Rogers premise. Allen plays a 20th-century man who is revived after being cryogenically frozen for 200 years. This world of the future appears attractive and luxurious due to many technological wonders, but has a hollow, antiseptic feel. Also, the poor and working class are conspicuously absent – as they are in nearly every story of this type. (Several bizarre, avant-garde homes in Aspen, Colorado, provided no-cost "futuristic" locations.)

The plot, such as it is, concerns a rebel faction battling against an oppressive government, but the story doesn't go anywhere interesting. There are some bits of fish-out-of-water comedy which, for me, landed with a thud. Allen takes a few jabs at Nixon and the sexual revolution (a hot topic in the '70s), but not much else. He has surprisingly little to say in an environment that is ripe for satire. Strangely enough, the Jerry Lewis comedy *Way, Way Out* (covered in Part One), also suffers from a similar humor deficit due to a lack of interest or just lazy writing.

By contrast, take the eccentric British film *Zardoz* (1974) from the same time period. An isolated society of eternally young intellectuals in a post-apocalyptic world is the setting for an amusing commentary on philosophical issues about life, death, and immortality. The script is loaded with funny and thought-provoking moments, including a clever connection to *The*

Wizard of Oz. A fascinating artifact of weird '70s cinema that still holds up, in a quirky way that defies analysis, and has something new to offer with each viewing.

The 1990s: Political Correctness and Better Living Through Chemistry

Demolition Man (1993) - Sylvester Stallone, Wesley Snipes, and Sandra Bullock star in this fun Warner Bros. action comedy. The story is quite similar to 1930's *Just Imagine*. A maverick L.A. cop (Stallone) and a violent psycho-killer (Snipes) are put in cryogenic sleep in 1996 and wake up in 2032. A funny satire of political correctness gone mad in an antiseptic, emasculated, not-so-brave new world. Sandra Bullock's cop character is even named Huxley (get it?). A running gag in the script has her mangling 20th-century sayings ("Take this job and shovel it").

The combined city of San Angeles is a farcical, utopian nanny-state that has banned everything "bad" such as alcohol, smoking, caffeine, meat, salt, chocolate, contact sports, swearing, gasoline, non-educational toys, et al. Sexual relations have been replaced by a no-contact virtual reality experience using headsets. Conversation is constrained by absurd, Orwellian happy-speak. People repeat the same stock phrases such as "Enhance your calm". An apology is "a de-hurtful retraction" and the now-forbidden handshake is replaced by the verbal "I formally convey my presence" (a helpful social distancing suggestion).

This is an especially clever spoof of liberal capitalism taken to absurd extremes (set in America's most liberal, materialistic city). The culture -- quietly taken over by a tiny group of elites -- is used to dominate and brainwash the public to the point of total complacency. San Angeles is an utterly vapid, but polite, society with no culture. Inane jingles from vintage commercials are now hit songs. A now-fancy Taco Bell is the only restaurant in town after winning the great franchise war.

Being an action-comedy, the script naturally avoids ideological comparisons regarding the corrupt elites. But it's worth noting that the gradual infiltration and subversion of Western

culture and education ("The long march through the institutions") has been the single-minded goal of neo-Marxist writers/educators based in the U.S. -- Herbert Marcuse ("Repressive Tolerance"), Antonio Gramsci ("Prison Notebooks"), Max Horkheimer ("Critical Theory"), et al. -- since the 1940s. Without their tireless efforts in re-educating the young, we simply wouldn't have political correctness, the Woke movement, Critical Race Theory, Antifa, BLM, and so much more.

Well-designed multicultural fashions include Indian-inspired robes and caps while the ruling elite wear Westernized kimono ensembles. (Snipes calls them "a bunch of robed sissies.") What doesn't hold up is the now-anachronistic "future" technology. A phone call is a "FiberOp", there are no mobile phones, laser discs are used instead of DVDs, and there are some crude computer graphics (which must have looked cutting-edge in 1993).

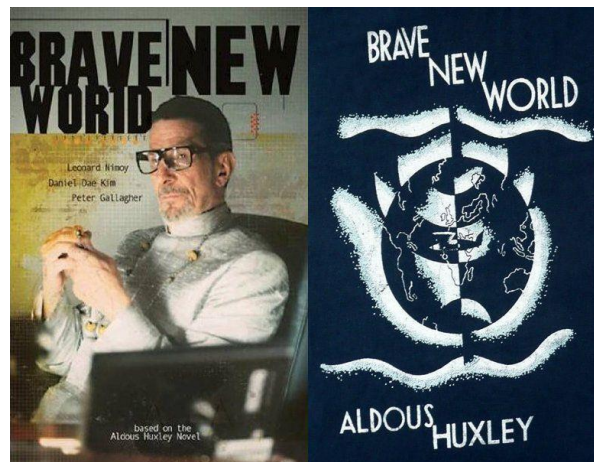
It's great fun to watch a gleefully unhinged Wesley Snipes ("I'm a blast from the past") crash through this wimpy, docile society like a human wrecking ball. The flustered police in this soft, beta-male world are comically inept. "We're police officers; we're not trained to handle this kind of violence." It's up to Stallone, the muscular man of action from the past (i.e., when men were Men), to bring down Snipes in an epic macho slug-fest.

The fight scenes and action set-pieces are top-notch, but it's the satirical take-down of (only slightly exaggerated) progressive, PC nonsense that really hits home. This film was way ahead of its time. Unfortunately, much of what it mocks has come true in the last decade. As a result, if this movie came out today, it would be attacked by the leftist PC crowd of critics and online gatekeepers and given a "trigger warning" for its intolerable celebration of "toxic masculinity", cis-gender hetero-normativity, lack of diversity,

cultural appropriation (see costumes), and the racist casting of a POC as the villain. But despite being dismissed as corrosive, right-wing propaganda made by and for Nazis, I bet the film, like the similarly non-woke *Top Gun: Maverick*, would be a hit.

Movies like this one (and *Minority Report*, another fine film) should be made every 30 years or so to chart our changing expectations of the future so we can look back and see what we did right, and where we went wrong.

Brave New World (TV-movie, 1998) - For some reason, the famous 1932 Aldous Huxley novel about a utopian society based on genetic engineering has never been made into a feature film. (Back in 1980 there was a respectful telefilm adaptation that has since been forgotten.) This 1998 made-for-TV movie, which stars Peter Gallagher and Leonard Nimoy, earns honorable mention for satirizing the information overload that defined the high-tech 1990s. While sticking fairly close to the original story, the script takes several amusing, then-topical jabs at over-the-top media saturation, relentless advertising, and mindless consumerism.



This was intended to be a cautionary tale about a soulless future where technology is worshipped like a pagan deity by a shallow, hedonistic society. Looking back from the perspective of the not-so-hot 2020s, those of us old enough to know better might instead experience a twinge of nostalgia for a simpler time. (Ah, the good old days -- before the scourge of social media, identity politics, etc. -- when the most annoying and intrusive aspect of modern life was advertising -- on television.) Sadly, those days will never return.

There's also a funny bit of Newspeak. Formal greetings have been reduced to a meaningless catch-all phrase that's rapidly recited without

pause or inflection: "Hello-how-are-you-I'm-fine-thank-you-very-much."

In many ways, the 21st century is still living in (or evolving from) the shadow of the '90s. Most of that decade's technological and cultural changes linger on in one form or another.

Unfortunately, like a radiation-mutant from a '50s sci-fi flick, the negative aspects carried over from that era keep getting worse.

For what it's worth, *Brave New World* was also made into a 9-part miniseries in 2020 (not available for review) that received a mostly negative response for deviating from the source material.

Gattaca (1997) - This all-but-forgotten movie also receives honorable mention for being the only feature film to do justice to the genetic manipulation premise from *Brave New World*.

The story, set in the near future, centers around a high-tech form of genetic discrimination that dominates all aspects of society. An oppressive government uses genetic engineering to break down the populace into a highly regimented and brutally regulated caste system.

Another nice feature is the extensive location filming at Frank Lloyd Wright's wildly futuristic Marin County Civic Center (in San Rafael, California). An extraordinary and surreal building (also used for *THX 1138*), I had the pleasure of visiting this site many years ago. A must for any architecture buffs visiting or residing in the Bay Area.

This intelligent and worthwhile film (starring Ethan Hawke, Uma Thurman, and Jude Law) deserves to be seen by a much wider audience. Unfortunately, it failed at the box-office and fell through the cracks. I hope it is rediscovered someday.

The 21st Century: Brave New World Order

Idiocracy (2006) - Written and directed by Mike Judge (*Office Space*, *King of the Hill*), this is a genuinely funny comedy -- but it's also scary and disturbing. Army private Joe Bowers (Luke Wilson), an underachiever of average

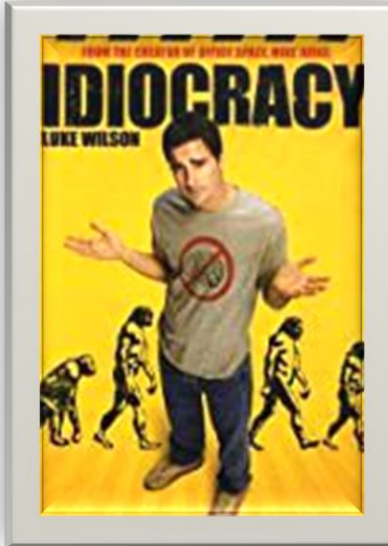
intelligence, takes part in a suspended animation experiment that goes awry. He wakes up in the year 2505 to find a world populated by media-addicted, semi-literate morons. America is now a third-world shantytown overrun with fast-food restaurants, mile-high garbage mounds, misspelled signs, and obese mouth-breathers who speak a hybrid language of hillbilly, valley girl, and inner-city slang.

The country is controlled by a mega-corporation called AOL Time Warner Taco Bell U.S. Government Long Distance.

The president, a former wrestler and porn star (played by the muscular Terry Crews), is sponsored by Mountain Dew. Clothing and other products are entirely covered with product logos and a power drink has replaced water. By default, Bowers is now the most intelligent person on Earth. He becomes Secretary of the Interior and strives to turn things around in this world full of idiots.

It pains me to say this but considering the tragic decline in 21st-century education, morality, tradition, and social discourse along with the shocking rise of ignorance, intellectual laziness (young people know nothing of history and don't care), and cultural decay (don't get me started on music) over the last two decades or so, *Idiocracy* might possibly become a reality in the near future. That is, unless it's possible to turn this sinking ship around and basically start over by reinstalling old-school systems that once held society together.

This effective satire on the dumbing-down of Western culture has been totally overlooked.



Reportedly, 20th Century-Fox had no faith in the film making a profit and dumped it (or maybe there were other reasons). The studio also failed to promote Judge's Office Space. Both films have subsequently developed a deserved cult following.

Snowpiercer (2013) - Based on a French graphic novel, this extremely well-made dystopian story unexpectedly crashes into this list, much like the super-train on which the story is set, for reasons that will become apparent.

Set in 2031, a new ice age has turned the earth into a frozen wasteland. A few hundred survivors live on an immense train that rumbles on continuously around the world without any destination. The passengers represent a cross-section of humanity segregated along the lines of a rigid, British-style class system. Aristocratic elites ride in decadent luxury in the front cars while the miserable poor are forced to live in squalor in the tail compartments. These unfortunates are treated like slaves and live on rationing bars that contain crushed roaches (and even had to resort to cannibalism in the past).

The plot follows the brutally violent uprising by this oppressed underclass as they battle their way, car by car, to the front of the train, encountering a few surprises (such as a classroom car for children) along the way.

Intentional or not, the film also provides a disturbingly on-the-nose representation of the type of top-down hierarchy that certain globalist billionaires openly discuss and promote -- including bug-eating peons at the bottom. Elaborate plans to replace meat with insect-based foods (for the proletariat, that is), eliminate air travel, privately owned real estate (see Blackrock Corp.), gas-powered cars (only the elites can afford the pricey EVs), and even the merging of mega-corporations with governments into all-powerful "collectives" (based on the EU model) are anything but secret. Published plans for this hierarchical "stake-holder capitalism" can be read by anyone and can't be dismissed as imaginary conspiracy theories. For starters, one can peruse the World Economic Forum (WEF) website ("You'll own nothing and be happy") and read its founder, and real-world Bond villain, Klaus

Schwab's scary book *COVID-19: The Great Reset*. Schwab's motto for The Great Reset, by the way, is "Build Back Better" (sound familiar?). Then compare the WEF's utopian nightmare vision with the all-but-identical published goals of the Green New Deal -- for the U.S. and U.K. (what a nutty coincidence). Fun fact: the WEF is also testing out "carbon-friendly" cricket-based foods in public schools in Wales. With so many new, innovative ideas for the future, what could possibly go wrong?

You Are What You Eat

If you frequent health food stores (or want to get a jump on The Great Reset before hipsters ruin it), pay extra attention to the ingredients listed on packaged snack items. I was amused to discover *Snowpiercer* is also the name of a food company that unironically produces a cricket-based protein bar. They must be fans of the film. Other producers such as Canada's Actually Foods (and its parent company Entomo Farms) are quietly adding "organic cricket flour" to their products. Hoppy Planet Foods, which features grasshoppers, is a cute name that hints at what they're selling. I'll take a pass on their pricey Chocolate Chirp Cookies. And beware of ingredients sneakily listed in Latin, such as *acheta domestica* (house crickets) or *acheta flour*.

There are even recently published scientific papers that float the possibility of turning human remains into food (as a last resort in times of extreme famine). It feels like *Soylent Green* is just around the corner.

Final Thoughts on Thoughtcrimes and Doublethink

Oscar Wilde once said: "I have no quarrel with actions, but words! Words can kill." George Orwell warned us that when you control the language, you control the way people think. Many of his predictions have come to pass, but the recent assault on language is the most insidious. Changing the definition of words, redefining free speech and how it should (or shouldn't) be protected, and the new stream of ideological nonsense words and phrases (birthing person, stochastic terrorism, et al.) that we are supposed to take seriously are just a few

examples that mirror the upside-down world of *1984* where “freedom is slavery” and “ignorance is strength”.

This erosion of logic, common sense, and the scientific method is bad enough in America, and even worse in England with its Online Safety Bill that targets "malicious communications" with "the potential to cause harm." In August 2022, this ultra-progressive bill led to the arrest of a man for "causing distress" by posting an image on Twitter that mocked the Transgender flag. For the first time, a Western democracy has turned the abstract concept of causing mental harm (via imagery or saying mean things online) into an actual crime (or "thoughtcrime").

Twitter has been widely criticized for its ham-handed, partisan censorship (The Taliban has a Twitter account while a certain ex-President is still banned). When libertarian Elon Musk proposed to buy the company, and make it more egalitarian, panic and outrage ensued all over the (left leaning) media. This terror over the expansion of free speech prompted the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to hastily throw together a Disinformation Governance Board (DGB) in April 2022. Nina Jankowicz was appointed "disinformation czar" with a mandate to establish "minimum speech standards." It was obvious to all that its real purpose was to legitimize the censorship of anything they didn't like coming from the political Right or those pesky libertarians.

The amusing part, which takes us back to Mr. Orwell, was the massive public backlash from every corner of the political spectrum. Invoking *1984*, the DGB was sarcastically dubbed The Ministry of Truth. Jankowicz (who became

known as "Scary Poppins") also received much ridicule for her singing video (a reworked show tune with satirical "misinformation" lyrics). After

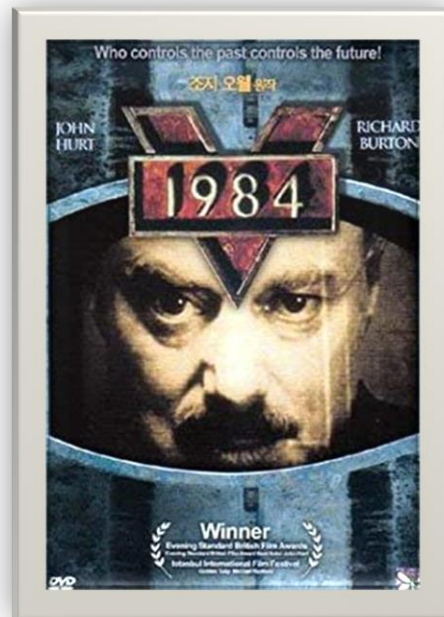
only a few weeks, Jankowicz resigned, and the ill-fated Board was disbanded. This incident represents irony at its very best. The public used free speech to crush and humiliate an over-reaching government agency created to crush and humiliate free speech advocates. It should serve as a model for the future.

Although most of the films in this two-part list are purely for entertainment, a few warn us of things to come. As technology continues to extend its reach into every aspect of our lives, the real world is

catching up to the futuristic predictions of Huxley and Orwell in particular. Just look at all the fanciful neologisms from *1984* ("Big Brother", "Thought Police", "Newspeak", "memory hole", "doublethink", "thoughtcrime") that are now in common usage.

There's no end to our speculation about the world of tomorrow (or this article). I suppose we should be grateful that we are not living in a Mad Max-type wasteland or an Idiocracy of dumb-dumbs (not yet anyway), and that there's still a chance that the right application of all our knowledge and technology will lead to a better world in the long run. Until next time, I'll see you in the future.

Bio: Jim Ivers (personal pronouns: ze/caixao) is an artist, with a degree and everything, as well as an editor/writer who pens the non-award winning "Trilogy of Terror" column, a scholarly study of vintage horror films, for *Scary Monsters* magazine.



“Poet on a Night Train”

an epic poem by *Joseph Green*

In 1965 Joseph L. Green – SF writer, future NASA manager and eventually *my* father-in-law, took a creative writing class at Chipola State College in Marianna Florida. As Joe had already sold a novel, *The Loafers of Refuge*, and several short stories, and the teacher had the instructor had published nothing, he knew more than anyone in the room. He got along well with the teacher, though, and when the final assignment – a short story – was made, the professor allowed Joe to substitute an *epic poem*.

Joe cast his poem in classic form and came up with a suitably uppity theme. The protagonist, riding on a train towards a new academic job, mulls an artistic decision. Will he opt to work in prose, classic verse or free verse? (The same question has kept *me* up all night.) You can discover his answer through what follows.

Joe aced the class.



Poet on a Night Train

Canto Anticipation

Swing and sway through crackling dark,
Where Shadows flee, where Death's
Old porter turns back the sheets
Of torture for a budding insomniac.

Behold the Cyclops' burning eye, ten thousand
Candlepower of stolen light, leading
The long black jointed worm of steel so black,
Of service true, of thunder tamed and held on
Geometric parallels extending to infinity
I rode the Night Train.

Full fathom five thy father lies,
Full forty pounds of books I bring.
Ancient and modern, meaning and beauty
Grapple and cling, preach and sing, torment
Unceasing, demand yielding. Two roads
Diverged on a Night-Black train, and I,

Regretting I could not travel both
I must decide by morning.

Round and round the words do flow, come
And so, grief and woe, come and go –
A mind that thinks in verse unrhymed,
And finds no profit in it.

Canto Sleepless

Round and round the words do flow, come
Solace me, Dylan! Let me tease restraint in words,
Unlike your life you mastered them. Let me
Share a song of Wales, of Church and snails,
In your thirtieth year in heaven. But Shelley
Calls, a jealous voice, and Browning cries,
Why this accent of meaning? Am I then too simple
For you?

Canto Prose

And there is still prose. Ah, lovely prose, I cast you
Down, turned rigid back on works of
Much great Merritt. How many prosers have sung
As sweet, of the ancient Gods of Babylon?
Has time's dark veil lost to us the beauty of descriptive prose?

Think you of these Gods of Babylon, and weep for what is lost.
Nannar! Begetter of Gods and Men! Lord of
The Moon! Lord of the Brilliant Crescent!
Self-created! Whose house is the floor of
Seven-tiered ziggurats in Ancient Babylon,
Whose altars are sard and chalcedony, whose other name is Sin!
Where white flames glare on moonstones great,
Where serpents sliver from silver mists, and
Great God-Hands shape beauty of breasts and
Thigh ... and Ishtar wakes, and Temple maids serve
Out their time as slaves to love.





Come, Temple visitor, worship Earth
Mother between warm thighs, pay a
Drachma golden, and know surcease
Of tension, hard erect demanding male.

And here are altars orange that glow
 With fires of opal, diamond, bright sunstone;
Here Shamash lives, atop Nannar, and his
 House is of Luster by day and knows no
night.
Here burn offerings of cardamon and
 Verbena and sandalwood, and the birds of
Shamash, whose heads are wheels of fire, sniff
 At incense otherwise known only to the Gods
Of Babylon, and guard the potter's wheel on
 Which Great Shamash shapes the souls of
men.

And next dark Nergal rules the sleepless dead, the
 Hornless One who in the end gets all: his
temple
Dark as the death fluid in his godly veins, this third
 Ascendance on the upward way. There burn
fires
Civet and bergamot, on altars of jet and bloodstone,
 Guarded by black lions that bit and sable
vultures that
Claw at the dead ashes of the passions of men.
 Dark Nergal waits ... but pass you by for now,
on to

Ninib, Lord of Spears, whose color is scarlet,
 Whose altar fires are fed by tears of women,
By the hearts of conquered kings. Where
 Boars wear wreaths of warriors' hands and
Elephants with crimson tusks dance on the
 Skulls of queens. Where swords smite and
spears slay,
And the forked tongues of snakes lick cities into
dust.

And fifth, the God of Wisdom reigns, Calm Nabu,
Whose blue fires burn on altars of amethyst,
And only the truth may shine! No lying incense
Veils reality here, where cold flames of emerald
Illumine the women's breasts beneath the
Silent mouths on the fishes of Nabu.

The sixth floor is Ishtar, Goddess of Love,
Full-bosomed, strong-thighed, deep cleft,
Whose altars are rose coral and marble streaked
With blue like mothers' breasts, where myrrh
And frankincense, attar and ambergris
Perfume the sensual air. Where lips meet,
And dove wings beat, and hearts sigh, and
Words lie, and in the end it matters
Not at all, at all.

And seventh and last Bal-Merodach, ruler of all,
Bull-necked, elephant-thewed, the Mighty One,
King of Heaven and Earth, Lover of Ishtar,
The Potent One, whose seed always grows,
Whose sac never empties. His altars are of
Gold, for this rules men, and cherubs mated to
Bulls guide their yellow shine. For
Is not man both bull and cherub? And does he
Not love wings, insufficient though they may be for flight?

But I declined your lure, Oh Prose, these
Many years ago. Do not torment me now.
Tis hard enough the chance I make, twixt
Old and new in verse *libre*.

These Chronicles of Martian men, reflections on
Our Earth are cast: Anne Frank hides in the
Attic of mankind's soul, And there's
Southern's *Candy* riding high in sales. Come
Taste the sweets of giving all, and lunch with
Candy neath Hippocratic bed. Aunt Livy writes,
Reissue *Fountainhead*, remember dear what Toohey said.





What Ellsworth Toohey said;
Giving for your own pleasure is a sin-shame.

Oh, sing of the Mountains of the Moon,
I'll *tell* you of Ruwenzori.

Through dirty glass a neon sign shouts REPENT!
You must be born again! The flickering
Spasms lighting a dying age. To hell with
The black and the white and red-all-over.
Thus trivia dies.

Canto Decision

And twenty pills a menstrual month
Keeps mucous membranes mucously,
Into old age. Shapiro might have said that, in
Accents of today. The tone has changed,
The words are bold, clear light of science
Illumines the darkest corners of men's minds;
That which was sacred – cows that Indians
May not eat, swine-flesh and wine
forbidden
Those of hem's vast brood – openly revealed,
And lost of mystery. Ellis said
You shall not Havelocks, and opened wide
The bedroom door. O'Hara led a thousand
Peeping Toms within. And have we gained or lost?

This to be love, that your spirit live in a
Natural holiness with the beloved, and your
Bodies to be a sweet and natural
Delight that shall never be lost of
A lovely mystery ... and can young love
Survive the microscope, five thousand power of
The psychiatric eye? Is love a misunderstanding
Between two fools? She walks in beauty like
the night
Of ... Lord Byron! Does England have need of
thee?

When Johnny K. of Darien speaks,
And Andrew Marvell marvels, the boom-boom
Boys sing beat-beat-beat, while
Vachel lists, and wonders.

But still ... when Byron sings of love
The tide itself would pause to hear; no fault of
Briny fingers that they wrap around the
Thighs of sister-half, incestuous maid,
Inspiring beauty in a mind burnt clear of dross,
Do you agree? Oh no? That's t.s. Eliot.

When Emily cries, and Amy mourns,
And Edgar Guest says do it now!
When Ogden kids the socks off feet
And *Fanny Hill* sits cheek by buttock
With Tropics North and South – by Supreme Court
Intervention – how can I, of this muddlin'
Mess make sense, make rhyme.

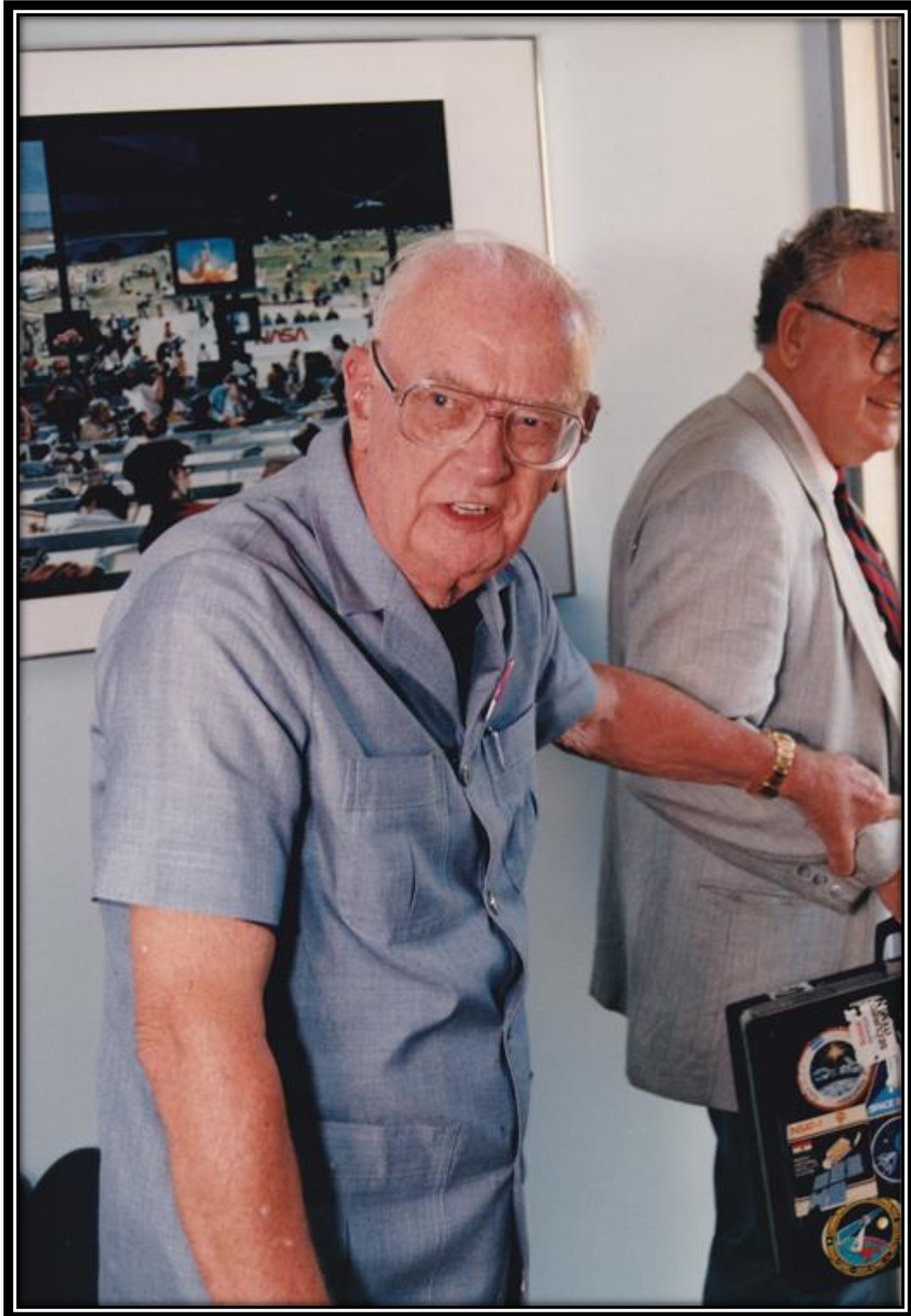
The light of dawn through dirty glass,
The campus close ... the moving finger writes
And having writ ... round and round the
Words do go, ebb and flow ... in the room
The women, talking of Michelangelo ... If there
Were world enough, and time ... How much do
I love thee? Let the count the ways! The old folks rest
In their sentimental hell.
Let'em rot.

I am no natural poet. Just a touch, the
Smallest trace of talent – twenty years of
Labor spent in seeking self might bring a
Measured strength, some small ability.
Meaning above all, sometimes obtuse, at others
Clear as rubber hammer striking wood,
Bent skin of car flaring out to rounded woman-curve.

It's done, then. I'll sing my feeble song in present tense.



FROM THE GREENHOUSE FILES ... Sir Arthur C. Clarke grabs Joe Green's arm during a tour of Kennedy Space Center. "Wait, Joe! That's the *ladies* room!"



KNOWING BUZZ

Gregory Benford

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I peered at the framed photo from *Life* magazine, June 8, 1953, issue. It dominated the wall near the front door, one of the first things you saw coming in. I recognized the Soviet MIG aircraft against a cloud background and a pellet beside it, a pilot ejecting. (Below, the last frame.)

Your gun camera, right?"

"Yep," Buzz Aldrin said proudly. "They didn't even ask my permission. Not that they had to. It's Air Force property."



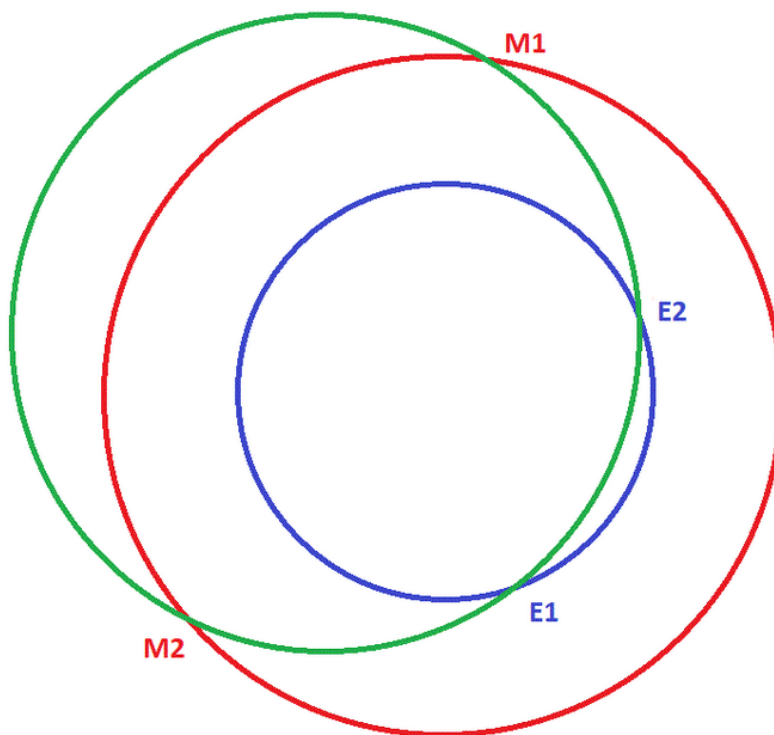
He talked about how jet fighter aces had to have fast, accurate reflexes. The Soviets were good enough but flying steel planes overpowered to make up for the weight vs. aluminum. He knew the North Korean pretense that their pilots were in the many MIGs shot down because he could hear the Russian spoken over radio. "We didn't say that publicly, of course. Kept up the fantasy that there were no Soviets in the war. I shot down two MIG-15s in sixty-six combat missions. I killed a lot of them on the ground, too. But that guy--" his hand flicked at the *Life* cover—"I met decades later. He survived that bail out. We laughed and put away a lot of vodka." A shrug. "That was on the moon tour."

All this factual, straight, as I watched Buzz walk over to the bar in his home, with a catlike grace I could never master. “Hold out your hand,” he said. I expected a glass of wine but he stared at my hand and said, “That’s why you’ll never be a high level pilot. Hand tremor.” Then I got the glass and held it gingerly.

Chastened, I sat, sipped the wine. I knew he had gotten a PhD at MIT, doctoral thesis *Line-of-Sight Guidance Techniques for Manned Orbital Rendezvous*, in three years (!). He wanted to better his odds in getting into orbit. That worked. Other astronauts call Buzz “Doc Rendezvous” and he moved up the mission ladder. “I was the only one with a PhD. I knew how to match orbits and did it a lot and it got me to the moon.”

Further, he published in 1985 the Aldrin orbit, a cycler that loops between Mars and Earth, using flyby kinematics to curve around, so a ship can travel between the worlds with nearly no fuel used. Put a small asteroid in that orbit, spinning it for interior centrifugal gravity, and you have an interplanetary hotel with rock shielding you from radiation: a colonist ship. We talked about that and Buzz said, “After the moon, I figured we needed a cheap way to get to the planets. I wanted to go on a cycler myself, a way to get back into space big time. The next big goal – Mars!”

Aldrin cycler. An orbit (green) that cuts the orbits of Earth (blue) and Mars (red) arranged so that it encounters the planets at the points where it crosses their orbits. (Not to scale)



He added that his father wanted him back in space, after he was second to set foot on the moon. “He didn’t quite get that to be first, I’d have had to climb over Neil! In a space suit.” He laughed.

I was in his home because he called me up (!) to ask, on his agent’s advice, if I wanted to write a novel with him. “We can meet regularly, hash things out, while you do the words.”

He handed me an outline, two pages long. We find evidence of an intelligent alien species that visited Earth long ago and left an encyclopedia with the collected knowledge of their culture. One is buried at the Moon’s South Pole, another in a crater on Mars. The

race is on to find, recover, and read it.

This discovery reinvigorates the American and international space program. A message from the stars! The history of the Tiberian species, from a planet orbiting Alpha Centauri, its desperate reach into space, the failed attempt to colonize our solar system. Humanity’s united effort to recover an alien artifact of immense value from Mars. A meticulous program for how to set up a permanent human presence--first in

orbit, then on Luna, and eventually on Mars. Speculative descriptions of somewhat plausible future interstellar travel. The technology was quite familiar to anybody who has read Robert L. Forward, I thought. Plus nearly off-the-shelf technology which is much more robust and much less expensive than Shuttles.

Buzz said he would contribute heavily to this section. Then, the outline combined two classic SF themes: the future of spaceflight and alien contact. The aliens' desperate efforts to colonize our habitable planet 9000 years ago, before their own is destroyed, runs up against a host of obstacles. Folly, prejudice, petty rivalries and bureaucratic befuddlement are common to both races. "I'd like you to show the aliens and our similar troubles with wit and empathy."

I said I would think it over and study the outline. I was still running the high energy density lab at UCI and getting grad students through their theses, in both theory and experiment. Plus my wife's kidney disease was worsening. And I had a multiple-novel contract with Harper Collins.

So I passed. I recommended instead a good writer, John Barnes. Not without regret, though, for Buzz was a great character.

My old high school friend Al Jackson had run the flight simulator at Houston so knew all the astronauts. He recalled that Armstrong was well liked but Buzz got the laughs. He proved that with a line from the eventual novel, written with John Barnes and issued in 1996, *Encounter With Tiber*: "The International Astronomical Union may go to the devil, and undoubtedly they have the address."

Encounter With Tiber was a long book, 570 pages plus a foreword by Arthur C. Clarke. Buzz loved tech and gear, so there was much detail, not needed to advance the plot or understand the characters. But to me it was truly richness, a realistic feel for being an astronaut in space. Buzz's fingerprints are all over the first section of the book. Not only does it give you an up-close and highly personal look at the inner workings of NASA; it dramatizes an uncomfortably intimate, gritty view of the politics of America's space program. The book sold well, an engineer's dream embodied in dense expository lumps. Now, with the Breakthrough Starshot initiative afoot, planning an Alpha Centauri probe is under active research. Buzz got there first.

He wrote another novel with John Barnes, *The Return*, in 2000. It heavily supports the view that tourism is needed to drive the space industry, which I have discussed with Buzz a lot since, and we agree. So does Elon Musk; I asked him just this spring. But the tickets will be steep, many millions.

He lives in the shadow of Apollo 11 and makes the most of it to promote space. He cycles back into the media, helped by such cultural references as Buzz Lightyear in the Toy Story movies. He has written several more nonfiction books, too.

He cycles still through media, though many younger people seem to have forgotten Apollo and its promise. A friend, Charles Platt, remarked to me:

I met Aldrin at a NY publishing party where he was trying to promote a book but a lot of people (amazingly) didn't know who he was. He was so happy to meet just one person who had some intelligent questions, we talked for about an hour. The one thing that sticks in my mind was when I asked him if photographs of the surface of the moon were accurate. He said he didn't know. He'd seen so many photographs since he walked on the moon, they had displaced his memory of it.

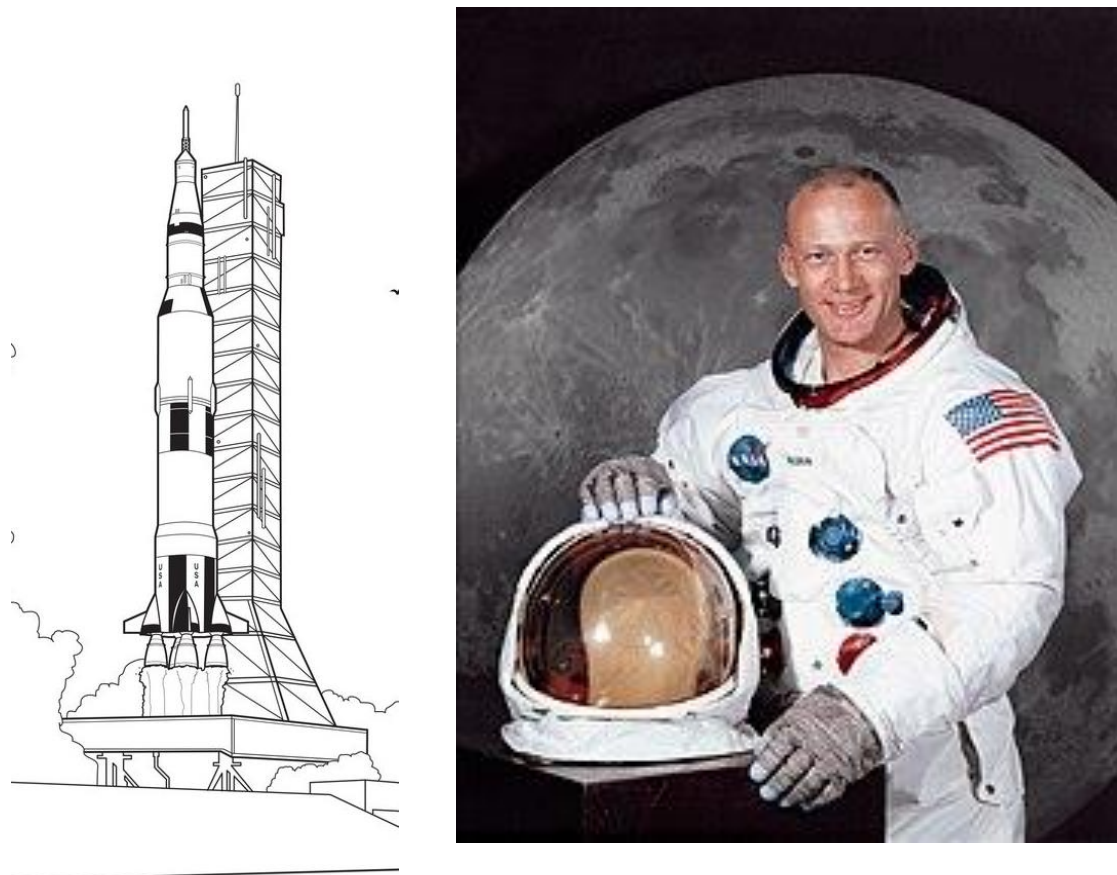
I was at a Planetary Society event in Pasadena about two decades ago when he came over to me and asked for a ride home. It was a great chance to catch up with a more mellow Buzz than I had known. I told him that Stephen Baxter had written a thick alternative history in which NASA went to the moon in the 1980s, with Buzz as lead character, and he blinked, surprised. He liked my car, a 1985 Mercedes 560SL, remarking that “I went to the moon but could never afford a buzz bomb like this.”

On the way down to Laguna Beach, I pumped us up to ninety miles an hour for a short stretch and he hopped with glee. He recounted how Bradbury had asked him about the sensation of riding into orbit. “Most of it is being pressed down and shook up.”

Ray had avoided airplanes for decades and never drove a car, but had overcome most of that and now could fly as a passenger. Ray said to Buzz, “I just need two martinis to get in the mood.” Buzz thought this was a lot to drink onboard but Ray said, “Those are just to get me *onto* the flight.” Buzz figured most people would feel the same about riding a rocket. But simple Dutch courage would not be enough, and nobody should use booze in space.

I hope I’d be an exception, about the fear,” I said. I still hope so, when I see us climbing back up our gravity well, bound for where Buzz wants to be. We are coming up on the 50th anniversary of the last time anyone walked on the moon, or even left low Earth orbit. He is still cycling back into view, holding forth for the manned exploration of distant worlds we can see beckoning in the sky.

Figure credit: By Hawkeye7 - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=74451664>





THE CHALLENGER TRIBUTE

Corlis Robe

There are a hundred reasons why Corlis Robe is tributee for *Challenger* #43, but only one for why this page follows directly upon an article about Buzz Aldrin. She worked with him.

Well, *sorta*. Corlis and her husband and Gary, co-founder of Southern fandom's vaunted "Robe Experience," were in charge of the autograph tables at L.A.Con III, where Aldrin made a speech and autographed photos and copies of his new novel. She was there when I told Aldrin "You guys gave me a helluva 20th birthday," Apollo 11 having landed on that day, receiving a grin in return, and she asked me to do an errand as Buzz scribbled away. This enabled me to make one of my grandest brags in fandom. I bought Buzz Aldrin a Diet Coke.

But we gather here to praise Corlis, Rebel Award winner for her work with Kentucky's ConCave, math professor, mother to Nick and Isaac, grandmother to XXXX (whom she plans to visit in Australia this Christmas). She's been a Southern fixture since she was Corlis Finlay, and all of fandom has been blessed to know her.

Since it's likely my projected Sturgeon issue won't be ready soon – and I ask for contributions, text or art or ideas – I call for concepts for the next *Challenger*. Has *The Bride of Frankenstein* been "zined" to death (so to speak)? Once more I ask for contributions, text or art or ideas – and LOCs on this issue!

ON PERSUASIONS OF THE WITCH'S CRAFT

by Richard Dengrove

Magic can be looked at in all sorts of ways. However, I wish to zero in on the magic that became popular with hippies and ex hippies in the '60s and reached its height of popularity in the 1980s. Magicians then sought a magic that worked better than science because they made up their mind they would no longer be the slaves of a blah rationality but would, spiritually speaking, take flight.

This article was just waiting to happen after a book provided the inspiration. Before Guy announced he was looking for articles on magic, Tanya Luhrmann's book *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft* made a re-appearance on my shelves. It had been hidden in either mess or among the many shelved books. It had attracted me around the year 2000 when I purchased it and read it. It attracted me now so I re-read it.

She did her research for the book during the mid-'80s when, as I said, that idea of magic was reaching its height of popularity. One would think, as an American, she would be out of place in Britain. However, that was not the case. As an American, her status in status-conscious Britain was not set: she was more acceptable than a Brit might be. Also, it helped that she had Cambridge University behind her. Professors she was working with there had contacts in magic.

Thus, while writing her book, she mixed with the offshoots of the Golden Dawn Lodge of the 1890s and the adherents

of Wicca. She associated with high magicians, like Gareth Knight; and with low magicians, like a "fen witch" she befriended.

There was no question that Tanya was very skeptical of magic's efficacy. However, her objective was not to cast spells but to find out why so many people believed. Doing what came naturally for a cultural anthropologist, she would have had magicians fill out questionnaires. However, that had acquired a bad reputation because of a previous researcher. Instead, she restricted herself to two less precise but maybe more informative methods of research: observing magicians, and actually training herself in and using magic in a number of traditions. Besides attending meetings and casting spells, this entailed immersing herself in the literature of magic and reading fav' magical' novels. As she discovered, like her, magicians read a lot of books and depended upon them.

In addition, training in magic included practicing meditation and visualization. More on that later.

As a cultural anthropologist, there was other work she had to do as well. Proving and coming up with theories was the whole idea behind studying magicians. She read a lot on the Cultural Anthropology of magic, and tried to find where her work fit in. In fact, she read a massive amount. I could not begin to compile a bibliography as complete as hers. On the other hand, she could have handled her conclusions better.

Unfortunately, they were her Waterloo. In order to find similarities with previous theory, she made her explanations complex and, at times, convoluted. Also, the theories were not right ones: I got the feeling that often she was not seeing the forest from the trees; and using apples to explain oranges. For those reasons, I began to wonder whether, as prescribed by scientific method, she was choosing the strongest theory from the myriad she worshiped. Or theories of any strength.

For my own view, I decided to give her experiences a simple explanation. I hope not too

simplistic. In all honesty, my conclusions are more philosophical than cultural anthropology. In addition, they are certainly not fodder for some learned journal, and I do not expect any article of mine to sop up the kudos from the cognoscenti. I claim no more knowledge of cultural

anthropology than my so-so sociology/anthropology masters. Also, I claim no great knowledge of philosophy beyond my junior year in college. Instead, my comments are aimed at, I hope, a popular audience.

To do this, I borrowed from Existentialism, which was popular when I was in college: namely, its emphasis on the purpose and meaning of life. You can arrive

at it neither by the reason of science nor the workings of magic. Instead, emotions that well up inside of you tell you your purpose and meaning. It could tell you a career you should take up. It could tell you a hobby or a pastime that you should while away time with. It could determine your taste in books. Whatever it does, it makes your world feel orderly and right. There is no reason why people can't find purpose and meaning in science, and some have. However, in the '60s to the '80s, a young person was more likely to find purpose and meaning in magic.

I think that young people had grown

wary of what their parents considered the sensible way to run one's life. For the young people of the time, there was something missing in their lives.

Something made them drab, if not purposeless. In addition, that which was sensible was seen as out of step with the times. Also, it seemed to lack

some spiritual nutrient. Furthermore, it was boring. All this comes under the aegis of lacking purpose and meaning.

On the other hand, they felt finding this meaning and purpose would require radical solutions. In short, the same forces that produced the hippies and the New Left produced the renaissance of magic. Only what was seen as more meaningful and purposeful in magic had been considered



irrational. In addition, it went back into the misty past for purpose and meaning, often more myth than history. Nonetheless, magic was invigorating.

For instance, the witch tradition. It has been associated with the witchcraft of the witch hunts and witch trials. That is datable mostly to the 15th to the 17th Centuries. Modern witch magic is loosely based on the confessions which were often tortured out of the accused. In trials such as these, which accepted 'spectral' evidence, it has been considered difficult to separate fact from superstition.

There is another source of information for peasant magic. A massive amount of folklore has been amassed based on old documents and asking country folk questions. Among the subjects of interest was magic. For instance, a good percentage of the surviving Anglo-Saxon documents were devoted to magic. That includes the pagan Anglo-Saxons. However, these country folk have been presumed Christian; and, for that reason, their views would not have found favor with the Pagans of the 1980s.

Astrology is actually old. It originated in the star omens of the priests of Mesopotamia. It evolved from divination by star omens to something somewhat more mathematical under the Assyrians around 700 BC. Under the Greeks and Greek influence, by the 3rd Century BC, astrology was as mathematical as astronomy. In fact, both were often considered one and the same science for the longest time. Also, the Greeks applied it to individuals as well as kings and countries. While minor changes have been in astrology, it has remained basically the same over the millennia.

Another magic that appealed in the '80s originated as the Kabbalah, which had evolved among Jewish people. Some parts of the Kabbalah date to the Torah, to the Books of Ezekiel and Isaiah. For our purposes,

though, we must look at the later Kabbalah. Letter and number were important in it. The idea of letter and number magic was borrowed from the Ancient Greeks. Of course, the Jews did a lot with it. It was mixed and matched. Letters had numerical equivalents. Also, words had magical powers if you expanded and contracted them in the traditional manner. Come think of it, they had magical powers if you mixed them and matched them with anything handy. The words of the Torah and the traditional of God were the most powerful ways you could use words, letters and numbers.

Later another type of practical Kabbalah arose in the 12th and 13th Centuries in Spain. It concerned the Sephiroth, the various emanations by which God created the World. Later, in the 16th Century, in Palestine, Rabbi Isaac Luria standardized the Sephiroth. The thinking has been each Sephiroth had correspondences both in our world and in heaven, and we can use them to make magic.

For the 1980s magicians, the next big event was yet to occur. From the 15th Century on, Christians borrowed the Kabbalah from Jewish people and made it their own. For instance, Christ and the Virgin Mary were given a place. This has been referred to as the Cabala.

Now we get to the 1980s proper: these magics had changed. Often in major ways. Astrology, as far as I can see, underwent no major changes. Its bedrock remained the position of the Zodiac and the planets. However, Cabala and witch magic underwent massive changes.

What was the massive change in witch magic? It was completely re-created. I doubt much of the witch confessions remain. I am sure it helped that it was reinterpreted by modern occultists. As far as I can tell, what we call Wicca originated from the coven a Gerald Gardner founded around 1946. After his rites were modified, Wicca

prospered. Wiccans rejected the idea that the Witchcraft witches of the witch trial period worshiped the Devil and were evil. At first, Wiccans worshiped a pantheon of gods. I gather the highest one was a horned god. Later, encouraged by the rise of feminism, a female god, the Goddess, replaced him as the highest god, and maybe other gods as well. Furthermore, modern concerns, like feminism and environmentalism, appeared in Wicca.

Next, we talk about the Cabala in the '80s. This also underwent massive changes. It had been sawed in half. The Sephiroth and its correspondences survived well enough. You could find many texts with the Sephiroth and its correspondences. For instance, unlike in some times past, some correspondence had to do with the Tarot and its cards. Still, the Sephiroth basically worked like it had in the 16th Century. Tanya reprints an instruction book where the lowest Sefirah, Malkuth, corresponded with the physical body and Earth. It had an angel and a color. The highest Sefirah, Keter, corresponded with the throne, decency and abstract thought.

Meanwhile, in Cabala, the word, letter and number magic, as ancient as it is, has been in eclipse. Theologians no longer try, by playing around with the numerical equivalents of the letters of famous people's names, to make the Pope or some Protestant leader into the 666 of the Great Beast.

I have nothing against adapting the magic of other times to the magic of the '80s. If you were dealing in science, it would be perfectly legitimate to adapt the science of other eras to our era. In the interim, scientists discovered new facts. It is true the magicians were not dealing in facts. However, as things stand with me, on this, there is no difference. The magicians of our era are dealing with meaning and purpose, which may have an even greater tendency to drift with the time.

What gave the people of the '80s meaning and purpose differs miles from what gave people meaning and purpose in 17th Century England, 13th Century Spain and 16th Century Palestine.

There was a problem, though, with believing in magic in the 20th Century – science. A lot of magic did not work as regularly and as effectively as the way we have come to expect things to work under science. Tanya mentioned magic conjured by some magicians that did not work. Some magicians excused that a correspondence did not work because they used the wrong correspondence. Maybe. However, that would not have satisfied people for whom science is a sure thing. There was another incident Tanya heard about as well. The English magician, Gareth Knight, was using chants to stop militarism. When he failed, his wife said he wasn't a good magician. Using rocket science as their criteria, others would have pooh-poohed that his chants would ever work.

Of course, were the objectives of magic ever those of science? Not in the '80s. Science's objective is to reconcile our theory with observations. No question about it. For that reason, a "sensible" person, like our parents would have picked science and spurned magic. However, for the younger generation, in a world of only science, the inner man was hurting. In the case of the '80s, a young person might very well prefer the "wisdom of the ages," like astrology, Wicca and Cabala.

Still, something had to be done to soften the pang of science. Tanya points out without comment that magicians trained by practicing meditation and visualization. I think most of us know how meditation works: you train by concentrating on a word or sound. With visualization, you train by concentrating on some scene. In one part of Tanya's book, Gareth Knight concentrated on seeing himself as a cabin boy in the 16th

Century on Sir Francis Drake's ship. A modest but strategic position in history. Another scene magicians concentrated on was the temple of some ancient religion.

I suspect, whatever was concentrated on, it was to draw our judgments from the outer person to the inner person; and make science less important in our lives and magic more important. Thus, if the sights and sounds of the world did not prove magic's efficacy, the inner person might. Magic may not have worked out, like science, in giving us discoveries in the material world. However, magic may have outshined science in stimulating its adherents. One of magic's star achievements is it gives order to the universe. True science cannot; not with its wild and crazy discoveries. Also, magic has wed us to the past while science is the science of the moment.

zzNonetheless, science won the battle that occurred between the 1960s and 1980s. Even in the '90s and among science fiction fans, I heard from Wiccans. I have not heard from them in years. I explain this the same

way I explain other movements from the '60s to the '80s. People ultimately concluded that neither our society nor our mentality needed to be changed that much.

Then, they settled on lesser nostrums. I suspect Robert Fuller, in his *Mesmerism and American Cure of Souls* (1982), was right that the same needs spiritualism met in the 19th Century were met by psychology and psychiatry. I also suspect the same needs met in the 1980s by magic are now met by science with a dash of magic and the occult. For example, in what is known as Complementary and Integrative medicine. That includes acupuncture, homeopathy and the power of suggestion.

Getting back to full-fledged magic more in line with ancient beliefs, it has not disappeared since the 1980s – not by a long shot – it is just that it is not the mass movement it was. You can find many astrology, Cabalistic, and Wiccan sites on the web. Of course, magic as a mass movement did not spring up from nothing. Magic was a formidable force before the '60s to the '80s. In fact, it was a sizable force in the 19th

Century. It was even a force, albeit a lesser force, during the Age of Reason in the 18th Century. In the 1790s, a *Conjuror's Magazine* was published in London, which later became the *Astrologer's Magazine*. In short, magic even survived the Enlightenment.

Still, the magic of 2022 is not the mass movement the hippies made it.

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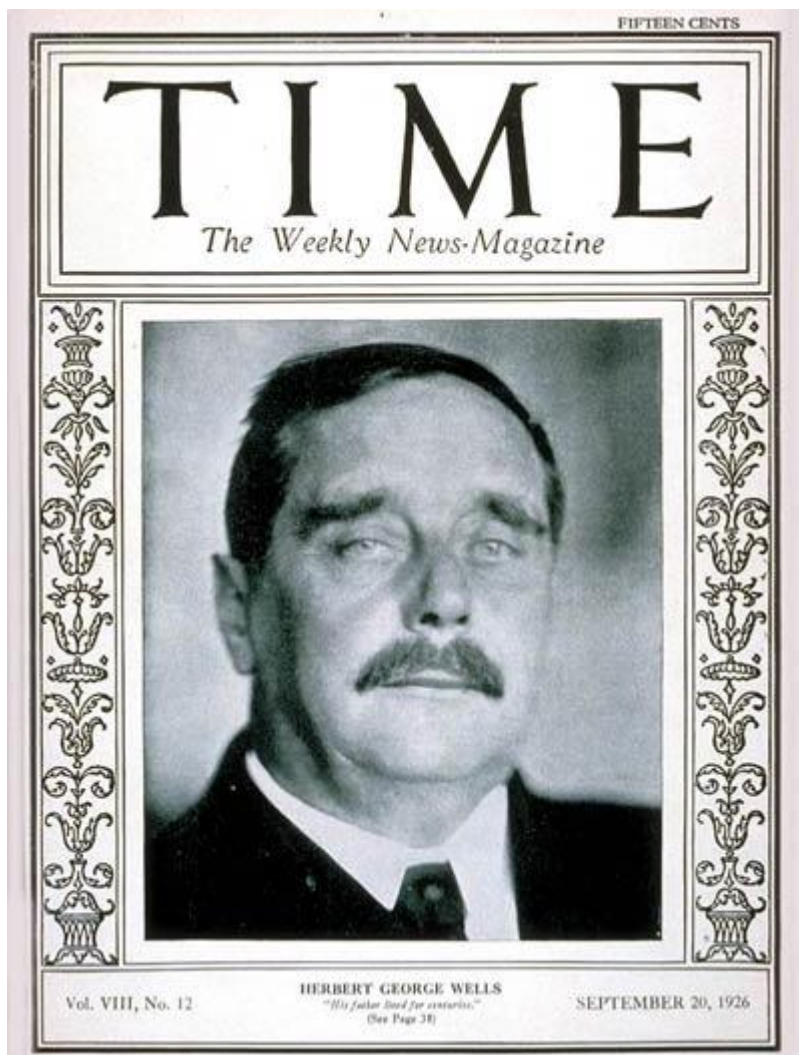
Hope in Isolation: The Ominous Permanence of Rampole Island

Justin E.A. Busch

Islands, for H.G. Wells, are symbols of human isolation, an isolation less and less possible and less and less desirable. This symbolism intersects closely with another foundational Wellsian concern: the arrogance of traditional individualism and its collective consequences. Nowhere are these two aspects of Wells' thought and writing more vividly or forcefully displayed than in *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island*, one of Wells' bleakest, funniest, and most searching satirical books. The heart of the satire is found in the depiction of life on the titular island, a depiction with ominous implications for life elsewhere.

Arnold Blettsworthy, raised by an aunt and uncle in an atmosphere of security and confidence, "had no suspicion that all this happiness and hope was destined to be only a bright foil for the series of dark experiences that was now descending upon [him]."

Misfortunes multiply; his aunt and uncle die, what appears to be true love is sabotaged by Lyulph Graves, an ostensible friend, who soon afterward bilks Arnold of £3,000. On the recommendation of the family lawyer Arnold takes a sea journey to recoup his health and psychological balance: "You can see work, you can see trade, *real* adventure, something of the Empire, much of the world." He sees rather less than expected; his privileged life has left him utterly unprepared to engage with the ship's captain and crew, and his attempts at conversation end only in mutual alienation; "my presence," he admits, "carried with it a miasma of hostility and distrust, and perhaps even more social embarrassment than before." Relations worsen



steadily, especially after Arnold witnesses a killing by the captain and begins to speculate on the demands of hierarchical power structures: "Was there no way of doing the world's affairs without the brutalizing of men?" It is at this point that Arnold begins to develop the understanding which, in a circuitous fashion, will drive much of the rest of the book (and which points toward a key moment in the reader's later understanding). Having seen the captain at his worst, Arnold begins to develop compassion for him; "at first I had seen nothing in this creature but a repellent ungraciousness. His desperate and exasperated struggle against an obdurate universe for the assertion of his own imperfectly apprehended will became manifest only as he battered himself towards ultimate defeat." The captain, having in effect defined himself by opposition, negatively rather than positively, is finding that external forces, whether of human will or natural phenomena of wind and sea, cannot be so easily denied by an individual acting alone.

Catastrophe ensues; the ship's engine fails, and the crew decamps from the wallowing hulk, leaving Arnold to die. He does not, and the story suddenly takes an unexpected turn in a much more complex and symbolically fraught direction.

Arnold is both rescued and captured by cannibalistic natives of Rampole Island. He was saved from being eaten because of a cultural taboo against eating the insane; "in common with unenlightened people the whole world over," he comments, the Rampolians "have an awe of the mad." He is unimpressed by his captors, seeing them as "dirty, greedy, lazy, furtively lascivious, morally timid, dishonest, stupid, very yellow, tough and irritable, and very hard, obdurate and cruel." These are not noble savages. Arnold draws a distinction between the Rampolians and the people of his own society, a distinction which will return to haunt him later. "Most readers I suppose would have expected a certain brutish directness from savages, but specialists in these things tell me that is never how things are in savage communities," he writes.

Savagery with its numerous taboos, its occultism and fetish, its complex ritualism is mentally more intricate than civilization. The minds of savages are even more tortuous than they are confused; they are misdirected by crazy classification and encumbered with symbolism, metaphor, metonymy and elaborate falsifications; it is the civilized man who thinks simply and clearly. And it is the same with primitive laws, customs and institutions; there is always irrational elaboration and disingenuousness. Civilization is simplification.

It will be a careless reader indeed who fails to note the seeds of later satirical commentary on contemporary Western civilization here. Nor do those seeds take long to sprout. Arnold takes it upon himself to provide the tribe's wise men with "an impromptu panegyric upon civilization and all that it had done and could do for mankind, mixing the two a little more thoroughly perhaps than the facts justified." Not only is he unsuccessful in persuading his listeners, he is accused outright of lying. "The real world is about you here and now, the only real world," he is admonished. "See it for what it is."

"And suddenly something gave way in my heart," he admits, "and I myself doubted of many of the things I had been saying."

These doubts are central; no one who has read this book can honestly accuse Wells of blind faith in a utopian process. They lead directly to what is probably the most memorable segment of the book, Arnold's encounter with "The Dreary Megatheria." These giant sloths, *Megatherium Americanum*, with their "long, dirty, coarse, greyish, drab hair, foul with lichenous

weeds and fungi, the scrabbling claws upon the stones and roots, the peculiar *stale* smell," are the focal point of the religion of Rampole Island, and the main reason for the intellectually and materially poverty-stricken conditions in which the islanders live. Chit, the wise man with whom Arnold has come to an uneasy agreement, tells Arnold that the megatheria are seen as effectively immortal. "They have this land to themselves. They eat. They lie in the sun. They have enough for themselves and there would not be enough for more." Arnold's attempt to comprehend, even to criticize, the megatherian existence is folly. The ensuing exchange again challenges Arnold's smugness about his own life and world.

"Why should they ever die? Nothing hunts them. Nothing eats them. Nothing dare hunt or eat because of the poison of their blood. Here they are. Part of your madness, Lunatic, is to be forever talking of this Progress of yours. Are there no Megatheria in your world? – that world of yours that keeps going on and on. Does nothing in your world refuse either to breed or die?"

"Nothing," I said and fell into thought.

"No animal," I corrected.

He watched me for a time, smiling that sceptical smile of his. Had he not been so manifestly a savage I could have imagined that he had penetrated to the reason for that reservation.

Arnold prides himself on his up-to-date understanding of evolutionary theory, but Chit's words challenge that understanding. "I had been brought up on the idea of a tremendous Struggle for Existence," he recalls, "in which every creature and every species was kept hard and bright and up to the mark by a universal relentless competition. Yet when one came to think of it, very few things indeed were really struggling for existence and scarcely anything alive was hard and bright and up to the mark."

Chit's question, like an unexpected move in a chess match, has suddenly shattered Arnold's comfortable sense of evolutionary superiority. The idea of the survival of the fittest, used so often by so-called social Darwinists to justify disregarding the need for supportive actions for the less well off (whether fiscally, physically, or politically), suddenly collapses in upon itself. The process of evolution guarantees nothing; for each species, and even more for individuals within a species, it is a matter of lucky positioning in relation to environmental changes rather than some metaphysical (often presumed to be anthropocentric) underpinning which generates the possibilities of survival. Taking evolutionary success for granted is in itself almost a guarantee of eventual failure. Only one species, as Arnold suddenly realizes, can make this error. "And I had still to realize that such a triumphant species as man can triumph only to convert its habitat into a desert. He burns and cuts down the trees that shelter his life, he brings goats to nibble Arabia into a desert, and now he sets about converting the nitrogen of the air into fertilizer and explosive so that presently his atmosphere may be unbreathable."

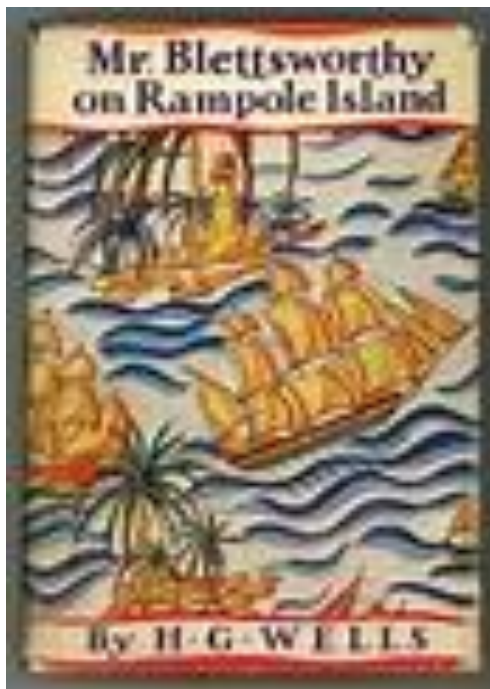
Wells' concern for environmental degradation, although it never occupied the central place in any of his books, remained of great underlying relevance. "The new power organisations," he wrote some years later,

are destroying the forests of the world at headlong speed, ploughing great grazing areas into deserts, exhausting mineral resources, killing off

whales, seals and a multitude of rare and beautiful species, destroying the morale of every social type and devastating the planet. [...] Quite apart from war, our planet is being wasted and disorganised. Yet the process goes on, without any general control, more monstrously destructive even than the continually enhanced terrors of modern warfare.

His description of the environmental consequences of "private enterprise for profit" closely echo those of the devastation wrought by the megatheria:

every tree and stump, without exception, is dwarfed and crippled by them. The grass of the open spaces has been devastated, except where prickly and thorny growths have protected a bunch of blades from the destroyer. They kill all flowers they see. And the eggs of birds they consume, crushing the nests, and against any small active creatures they wage a sluggish yet surprisingly effective war.



The environment itself proclaims the catastrophic consequences of unhindered natural power.

The seeds of doubt now flower into a stark understanding. Evolution, for a self-conscious species, cannot exclude the products and processes of that consciousness. Biology by itself is no longer destiny; destiny comes as the result of conscious forces interacting with blindly mechanistic ones. Physiological structures play their roles, but so do social and political ones. As Arnold now sees, "the laws and institutions of mankind came just as much within the scope of biological generalization as the life of any other living being." His conception of evolution expands enormously; "it occurred to me that states, organizations and institutions breed as little, have no more natural death nor any greater willingness to die, than one of those Megatheria."

There is a new, self-referential, frame of understanding here: the individual Arnold Blettsworthy, and possibly the individual reader, comes to recognize that any and all frames of understanding must be, and must be affirmed as being, temporary. Only through such an affirmation, one which must be made at the level of the individual, can the individual begin to become free.

The lesson is not so simply learned. Arnold, having broken through one faulty understanding, promptly, if only briefly, falls prey to another. "Man, real Man-- as I knew him-- grasps his problem and reconstructs," he insists to himself. "He can emerge. He will set about this business in a different fashion from your poor Islanders." His reveries race swiftly forward; if civilized humanity has this power of understanding, one not granted to savages and lower animals, it follows that acting upon that understanding will at once correct the problem.

For man, real man, has the power of learning from his failures.

There was to be a Winding-up of the past, like the winding-up of a business that amalgamates and reconstructs. [...] I seem to remember a conference of civilized persons-- with the edified Chit lying on a heap of moss as the only spectator-- and how we were discussing a prospectus, a prospectus for the Voluntary Liquidation of Organized Christianity. This was to be the prelude to some inconceivable reconstruction, some religious rejuvenescence that was to make all the world happily vigorous and vigorously happy.

Alas for Arnold, who seemed to have arrived at a satisfactorily Wellsian conclusion, one clearly redolent of *The Open Conspiracy* (published in the same year as this novel), his speculations are brutally disrupted by an attacking megatherium. After barely escaping, his thoughts are once again less sanguine; "my vain imaginations about reconstructing churches and institutions and starting the civilized world anew by common consent, were completely scattered and disposed of among the harsh realities about me."

As it turns out, there is an even harsher reality to be discovered by Arnold: Rampole Island is not real; it is a hallucination created as the result of a nervous breakdown caused by his terrifying experiences aboard the sinking ship. Arnold's years of experiences, and the insights derived therefrom, are "no more than a dream," a dream from which he at last awakens to find himself in New York City. Chit, the person who had for so long insisted that Arnold face reality, turns out to be Dr. Aloysius G. Minchett, his doctor, who had been a member of the scientific expedition which had discovered and rescued Arnold. Arnold, in his mania, had caused much trouble for his rescuers; as Dr. Minchett notes, "you weren't popular. You just hated all mankind for a lot of dirty savages and-- Well, you were tactless about it. They would have dropped you out of that ship almost anywhere if it hadn't been for me, but I said you weren't merely a vexatious human being; you were my one scientific specimen, and that made you respectable."

This discovery is socially fraught. Wells, without calling any attention to the fact, here uses contemporary racial (and racist) attitudes to excellent effect. Chit has been presented all along in a manner allowing superficial readers to see him as stereotypical dark-skinned savage, a portrayal far too many of those readers may well have taken as perfectly plausible. There were hints to the contrary throughout Arnold's interaction with him (Arnold saw him, for instance, as having "an intelligence uncommon on the island, a watchful intelligence," an estimate later intensified to "super-intelligence;" still later Arnold witnessed the manner in which "some subtle infiltration of delicacy civilized the intelligence of his face."), but Arnold's descriptions of the odd nature of life on Rampole Island, and of Chit's position as a wise man within that life, ensure that the clues will be noticed only by a careful reader. When it turns out that Chit is in fact a creation of Arnold's reaction to his dark-skinned doctor, though, the reader is impelled toward the recognition that it was the supposed savage who has been the lynchpin of Arnold's return to something approaching sanity. Arnold, carefully developed as a fine exemplar of the educated white middle class, has been utterly dependent upon someone else, someone whose appearance alone would have disqualified him, in the eyes of many persons and the laws of many states, from consideration as a potential contributor to world progress. This twist may no longer have the impact it once had, but its political implications remain untarnished.

Arnold's (and the reader's) discovery is followed by a theoretical analysis of the situation by Dr. Minchett, one recounted by Arnold. This double narrative (echoing plenty of others throughout the book) is itself the structural embodiment of the theoretical points being made.

Minchett's analysis is "based on the idea that our apprehension of unreality is never exact or uncritical. We filter and edit our sensations before they reach our brains." The consequences of this sort of mediated experience are immense:

Even the least imaginative of us lives in illusion, protected and given confidence by this mitigation of exterior things. All minds are selective and admit what may prove humiliating and disagreeable as little as possible. We continue to edit and revise long after events have been apprehended. What a man *remembers* about yesterday is not what he actually saw and felt at this or that moment yesterday. It has been touched up and expurgated, cut about to fit his convenience and his self-love.

Hence the nature and significance of Arnold's intense hallucination. It is, like so much of the novel's structure, double-edged. *Arnold's illusions are a direct response to the loss of other illusions.* His dominant persona "clung obstinately to the idea that the world of fair illusions it had lost still existed as the main world of civilization, out of which [he] had fallen and to which [he] should presently return."

Arnold, like the novel (or the novel, like Arnold; the two are indistinguishable), has been self-conflicted because he has relied too much on his own strongly individualized expectations as the foundation of his sense and definition of reality. Even though he was receiving information from the external world he was instantly editing it so as to exclude himself from participating in the unpleasant aspects of that information, maintaining thereby his strong sense of individuated identity. The parallel between this attitude and that of much traditional fiction needs little elaboration; "formerly there was a feeling of certitude about moral values and standards of conduct that is altogether absent to-day," Wells commented in considering the social import of novels. As he subsequently noted, "The novel reflected this quality of assurance." There is something comforting to many readers about formal perfection, or even a clear attempt to attain it; a well-rounded tale, even one in which terrible things happen, proffers, in and through its form, a glimpse of a serenity rarely attained in most life-experiences. Nor does the existence of dystopian stories refute this. Many of them offer the serenity of superiority; as bad as the reader's life might be, it is by no means as grim as the world portrayed-- and in any case the terrors depicted come about as a result of letting the wrong sorts of people (that is to say, people whose views differ from those of the reader) gain control of the levers of power. Dystopias often dispense the serenity of smugness, the attitude that nothing need be done save resisting those who would change the present course in favor of something unknown and uncertain.

Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island provides its readers with clear distinctions between two approaches to reality: the inclusive and the exclusive, the utopian and the dystopian. The latter is the world as experienced by Arnold on the island; its significance rests mostly, or even at times wholly, upon his individual mental framework. This is the reality of relativism, the world in which reality is simply what the individual, whoever they are and however they came to be that way, makes of it. Taken literally and to its fullest implications it descends into solipsism, for it requires denying the very existence of others. Even in its less virulent forms, such as defiant egotism, it remains, as Arnold comes to discover, unsustainable; the complexities and contradictions with which each individual is riddled eventually lead to structural disjunctions threatening to collapse altogether.



The inclusive approach, demonstrated already by Dr. Minchett, requires engaging with others, defining oneself more expansively, acknowledging the necessity of cooperation, collaboration, and community in shaping and opening one's sense of reality. It is, in fact, the natural tendency of human beings; affirmation of one's achievements or one's needs requires the presence and participation of others. Genuine solipsism is possible only at the price of insanity; in the end it requires denying oneself as well as others. Arnold and the reader are reminded of this bedrock reality when, at the climax of his hallucination, he responds to seeing a young woman hurl herself into a deep pool of water in an evident suicide attempt. Arnold's response, prompted by "all the ancient traditions of the Blettsworthys," is instant: "You must rescue drowning people, though you drown yourself in the process; nothing is more sacredly imperative." This is no hallucination; Arnold is in fact carrying out the same action in the world outside his illusion, and it is exactly this which begins the process of breaking down that illusion. Dr. Minchett makes the connection explicitly: "She brings you back to your senses," he informs Arnold, "by pitching herself into the Hudson River up above the Palisades, just as you were wandering along the bank alone."

Time and again we will see something similar occur in Wells' fiction. It is the acknowledgement of the needs of another, and, even more profoundly, the decision that those needs outweigh one's own desires (even if just for a moment), which opens the possibility of genuine transcendence of the individual, of genuine human interaction. The healthy individual is healthy only to the degree that they are engaged with, and responsive to, other human beings; their own self-development requires not only being aware of, but being involved with, something beyond and greater than the self which is seeking to develop. Wells, though, does not approach this idea simplistically; he is fully aware that possibilities at the individual level replicate easily at the societal level both creatively and destructively. A person seeking to avoid isolation is all too likely to assume that the group with which they have identified themselves is itself both clearly defined and solidly united against other groups; solipsism recurs, but this time at the level of a group.

Arnold, having recovered from one kind of madness, soon falls prey to another for precisely this reason. The Great War is raging across Europe, and Arnold's sense of family honor combines with an even more powerful sense of social pressure to impel him to enlist. "It was impossible to ignore the war in those thunderous days," he recalls. "It was the frame of all contemporary reality. It swallowed up the world. If one was not to be a combatant, then one would have to face the drive of all the millions who were, as the phrase went, "doing their bit." It was an opposition altogether too immense for me." His experience mirrors that of much other patriotic cannon fodder; the self-conception his sense of individuality insisted upon leads him directly into a situation in which individuality matters not one whit. "The faithful multitude obeyed their foolish orders and learnt too late the fruits of obedience," he comments bitterly.

Upon many miles of front the unburied British and French still lay in swathes of khaki and horizon-blue, where they had been sent to be mown down by the German machine guns. Later on I too was to fight my way over those battlefields and see the multitudes of our unburied dead still lying many of them in line as they fell, others in the holes to which they had crawled to die, horribly mutilated by their wounds and now far gone in decay, contorted grotesquely, rotting, rat-eaten, robbed, in tattered uniforms with the pockets inside-out, their faces, or rather what had once been faces, seething masses of flies amidst smashed equipment, dud shells, wire, and splintered trees.

In case the reader does not make the connection for themselves, Arnold adds a further savage single-paragraph assessment: "But through those defeats Ardam [the military leader of the Rampole Island tribe] got his conscription and our mankind was now all his slaves."

The structural implications of the novel now reach their climactic intensity. Arnold, having witnessed the insanity of delusion and the insanity of contemporary reality alike, having lost his personality twice to different forms of terror and the shadow of personal extinction, having been mentally and physically wounded brutally and pointlessly, is forced, by the very nature of his experiences, to confront the impossibility of creating a narrative which can be wholly trusted, *even by himself*. His memories, the only resource available in constructing his story, are hopelessly tangled. Perhaps the delusional experience of the horrible Rampole Island is itself simply another delusion, one from which he has yet to wake. "My queer memory, so strangely mobile, which will let nothing rest unchanged, which embroiders and breeds and rearranges in a perpetual search for a logical and consoling presentation of life, may have thrust back a myriad impressions from this latter phase [the war] into that visionary experience before my sanity was restored." But if this be true, perhaps there is truly no escape from delusion, no escape from conflict, no escape from a trivial life and a demeaning death.

"I am still upon Rampole Island," I said, "and there is no hope here. That fair and kindly civilized world I dreamt of in my youth was a childish fairyland. In this gorge we must live hatefully, driven by ignoble stresses, and in this gorge we shall presently die."

No answer is forthcoming; the novel's outcome is left uncertain. Embedded within Arnold's internal dialogues, though, are two encounters which, taken together, hint at the conditions for one potential way out of the dilemma in which Arnold finds himself, conditions which will take some time to develop.

The first comes as Arnold dines just before first reporting for military duty. The

restaurant is crowded, and he finds himself seated across from the very captain who had left him to die years before. The meeting does not turn out as one might expect. The captain, now serving as a marine auxiliary, is only slightly surprised to see Arnold, who attempts to maintain control over the situation; "I did my best," he says, "to be cold, hard and ominous. "The man you drowned.""

By all the rules of the game, that ought to have puzzled and disconcerted him, but it did nothing of the sort. "There's chaps," he said, "you *can't* drown. If this war hasn't taught me nothing else, it's taught me that."

"You did your best."

"It was one of them antipathies," he said with the faintest flavour of apology.

He laughed grimly and prepared to finish his soup.

"Gods!" he said. "How sick I got of that face of yours at meals. Sick isn't the word for it."

By this time I was altogether disconcerted.

Instead of barraging the captain with denunciations, Arnold ends up having a lengthy conversation with him, a conversation in which the captain does most of the talking. When at last they part company it is "with an unreal cordiality."

Arnold's encounter with the captain mirrors and summarizes in miniature the overall structure and character of the novel, which is replete with sudden shifts in situations, in expectations, and in putative moral understandings. These shifts are neither random nor isolated; they rest throughout on the underlying bitter satire of the human condition, a satire which seems to presage the conclusion that the whole world not only is but can be nothing other than Rampole Island writ large. "I realized more than ever I had done," Arnold recalls of listening to the captain's gleeful account of destroying submarines and watching their crewmembers die, "that Rampole Island had indeed now spread out and swallowed all the world. I hadn't a word to say for civilization in the face of that self-satisfied flow of homicidal knowingness." Arnold's understanding has been purged of several kinds of false assurance; it remains to be seen what he could possibly make of his harsh stark freedom from the dogmas of what has hitherto passed for civilization.

Soon afterward Arnold loses a leg in combat. Recovering in a hospital, he discovers that another patient in the ward is the chiseler Lyulph Graves, the former friend and business associate who stole £3,000 from him. With Graves, too, he converses, but at greater length and depth than with the captain. The results are likewise different, less grim but equally unsettled. Their talk begins with memories of Arnold's lost romantic relationship, the one sabotaged by Graves; in the end the young woman married a butcher. "Her tastes were always simple," Graves muses, "and I'm sure he's made her far happier than you or I could have done." Graves had visited her recently; her memory of the two failed loves has faded, or been edited, over time. Graves thinks it for the best; "If you don't reject the difficult things," he tells Arnold, in words setting the agenda for much of what follows, "you must adapt them and dress them up and cover them over. They complicate and hamper.... What is the good of that? And where does it get us?" Arnold demurs. "When you reject things," he argues, "then even if they do not trouble you in your mind for a time, they are still round about you, moving against you or at any rate moving

without any regard for you." He means this as a statement of a problem, which indeed it is, but the reader will discover another possibility latent within its purview.

The two men, wounded both physically and psychologically, spend much time in discussion. "I found it pleasant, I found it stimulating," Arnold comments with a touch of surprise, "to have resumed my acquaintance with Lyulph Graves. There was I realize a natural interchange of interest between our minds. Subconsciously I had missed him." Thus begins the final twist in the tale. Lyulph Graves, embezzler and rogue, will become the speaker for H.G. Wells. This is no accident; rather, it is a key aspect of the narrative's central purpose. In this book it is not so much what as being said which matters as much as the fact of its being said at all, who says it, and under what circumstances. It is the reader who must decide the import of the various memories and conversations.

Arnold's postwar situation is similar to the later life of Edward Prendick in *The Island of Dr. Moreau*; his faith in humanity has been equally shaken. "I scent the whiff of Megatheria in the London air more often than I confess," he writes, "and time and again I feel the Captain going about his implacable cruelties behind the thin screen of this post-war world. So far from forgetting Rampole Island, it is this sensible world that sometimes threatens to vanish out of my consciousness, and I have to exert myself to keep my hold on it." Nor do current events assuage his fears; he recognizes his own complicity, as a successful businessman in a capitalist world, in the repressive violence on which his world rests. The notorious Sacco-Vanzetti trial especially shakes his conscience; "And in my fantasy it was like this," he confesses,

that when these two were at last executed we all killed them, all of us, they were torn to little fragments, handed out, and their flesh was eaten by everyone who acquiesced in their fate. "Eat," said a voice, "since you could not save them!" Such is the cruel over-emphasis of these visions; they magnify verities into monstrosities. I was thrust and compelled to the open place before the temple of the Goddess, where the killing and tearing to pieces was done, and the portion that was given to me to eat was exactly like one of those quivering fragments I am always trying to forget that were scattered by the shell-burst just before I got my wound. "Eat, since you belong to this affair!" The thing repeated itself over and over again. First very swiftly came the killing, and then interminably that hideous sacrament. Always one shared. Everyone shared.

Although specific memories of the Great War's impact have faded, the intensity of Arnold's emotions remains evident, as do the social implications should his concerns be felt widely.

Lyulph Graves is dismissive. "It [the trial] is not the monstrous event you think it is," he asserts; even its process demonstrates the possibility of hope for the future.

It is as natural as a man stamping on a mouse. It is a stupid social system defending itself against a real though feeble attack. You think in metaphors and visions that distort more than they emphasize.... After all you are not so certain those men were so entirely innocent. And all mankind was not against them. There were long reprieves and they found advocates and supporters. If cruelty and prejudice triumphed at last it was only after a long struggle.

In terms of history Graves is right; few such events at any time have the importance their contemporaries assign to them. In personal terms his point is perhaps not wholly persuasive to

Arnold, but the manner of his making it is significant. "He drew me into an argument. He forced me to retranslate the glowing horror of my vision into arguable propositions. We disputed late, and as we disputed the power of my hallucination declined. That night I slept and the crisis passed." Arnold, and with him the reader, has begun to discover two of the key conditions for genuine hope, if not certain progress.

The first is forgiveness. Forgiveness comes from understanding and, like understanding, is an ongoing process. It applies equally to oneself and others. We see its beginnings in Arnold's encounter with the Captain; while his memory remains hostile, his actions respond to the Captain as a person, flawed and brutal no doubt, but a person nonetheless. The understanding begins as a question: "Was he or I the human being? Was I or he the abnormality?" The answer, of course, is that each is both. The pleasantries as the two men part company for the last time are not merely window dressing; they express Arnold's nascent understanding of the situation of the individual in a brutalized society. They are, in a sense, the frame through which his rapprochement with Lyulph Graves can enter. There is no doubt that Arnold reaches the level of genuine forgiveness for Graves. His response when Graves repeats his intention of repaying him is telling: "Why burthen the future with the blunders of the past? I'm quite willing to wipe off all that. For the sake of what you and I have taught one another." Forgiveness does not exist in the abstract; one must forgive a specific person for specific reasons. To do so is to treat them as an individual, rather than as a symbol or a member of a group. What Arnold had begun, not wholly consciously, to do with the Captain he extends far more deeply into his comprehension of, and relationship with, Graves. It is, or at least points toward, a form of love.

Love is the second, and even more important, condition for hope; "No world is dead if love can live in it." Love, too, requires understanding, but of a different kind. It is also a process; unlike forgiveness, which takes place at a particular point in time (although getting to that point may be a very long process indeed), and which, if genuine, needs never be revisited, love is a single term covering an indefinite series of thoughts and actions. Arnold's explication of the centrality of love comes in the midst of his recollections of lying, injured and bleeding, in the midst of an ongoing battle. This is no mere coincidence of rambling pain-wracked thoughts. "I had to square myself to live in a system of things that from the pus and poison in my wound to the utmost star had neither benevolence nor purpose with regard to me," Arnold states. His analysis strikes at the heart of contemporary superstitions. "There is," he knows now, "no kindly Human God, no immanent humanity in this windy waste of space and time." These admissions, though, are not the prelude to despair.

And yet there is goodness.

There is this something that is between Rowena and myself. It may be impermanent and vanish. That will not alter the fact that it has been between us and above us. It was neither her nor myself. It had nothing to do with any gratification. It was better than either of us. It was and it still is love.

Love entwines with beauty. "There are certain moments of visible beauty and there is something in great music, that makes the Captain at his vilest and most terrible seem small and defeated." The two together engender courage; "surely out of something good but altogether incomprehensible to me and altogether beyond me, that courage must come."

Love points outward; its very existence suggests the possibility of an expansive self-conception, one not rooted in competitive individualism. It is this understanding, already

growing within him, which is Graves's gift to Arnold. "Need a man nowadays," he asks, "measure the value of things from the standpoint of the individual?" The closing section of the novel subtly reinforces the point.

The final section of Arnold Blettsworthy's first-person narrative consists mainly of a conversation between Arnold and Graves; as with the unexpected final meeting between Arnold and the Captain, it is Arnold's interlocutor who speaks the most. Arnold's own story, *even as it remains true to his dominant persona's character*, expands beyond the boundaries of self and ends with the words, hopeful and perhaps even optimistic words, of another persona altogether. "You are the doubter-- always. Take my word for it-- it is your Rampole Island that will pass away, and I who will come true." There is no justification for this claim, and Arnold has raised many objections to its predecessors. Yet positioned as it is within Arnold's story, it seems to serve as an unexpected summary of Arnold's own mental development.

Evolution is at the heart of *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island*. The truth of evolution, echoed throughout the novel, is that there are no guarantees; what has worked for millennia may cease working altogether tomorrow. What is true for a species is true for a society; what is true for a society is true for an individual. Yet these truths are only foundations; what matters is not mere facts but what is made of them. This is a bleak novel, in the sense that it refuses to reject or deny the brutalities of life as we know it; there are few final answers save death for the characters, and none is wholly earned or deserved. Bleakness, though, is not and could never have been the whole point or purpose of the narrative. Even the bleakest novel, by its mere existence, transcends despair. To write is to express hope, a hope which reaches beyond the time and life of the writer. "Hope dies only with life, for life and hope are the same," as Arnold admits. This is thus a novel of hope as well as one of despair, for it refuses also to endorse the bitter conclusions its truths might seem to entail.

By its inconclusiveness, *Mr. Blettsworthy on Rampole Island* invites the reader to contemplate the nature of truth and its relation to choice. In its evident structural and expressive uncertainty, it encourages the reader to join the concluding discussion, to make their own choice(s) regarding the future-- theirs and humanity's. In its ironization and outright abrogation of traditional formal elements, it suggests extended possibilities of human experience, offering the reader a glimpse of similar possibilities in human social and political structures. In refusing



to insist upon specific answers, it compels the reader beyond its boundaries, and perhaps their own, toward a future yet to be defined. The selves which will create that future remain, as Wells sees so clearly, under the shadow of Rampole Island, but a shadow is, by definition, not reality in itself. There thus remains, in however attenuated a form, the possibility of hope— if we choose to act upon it.

A story by Guy Lillian, with thanks to Inge Glass, Brigitte Hessling, and tou jours, la belle.

Translated into Romanian, this story was published in the on-line magazine Galaxia42. This is its first appearance in English.

Verruckt? Last month they told me that my father had died. The doctors would not release me to attend the funeral. In the weeks since I have become a father myself. They will not allow my wife to bring our child to me. *Verruckt? Yes. Mad.*

I believe them. Will you believe me?

I was both pleased and surprised when happiness came to my brother Manfred. He was four years my junior, and though the common wisdom says that families lavish the most hope and ambition on the older brother, and expend a surfeit of love and approval on the young, this truism did not bear in our father's house. Papa adjudged his sons strictly and competitively, despite the gap in our ages, and I was never happy to hear him compare Manfred, unfavorably, to me. Yes, I did well at my studies, and Manfred was a disinterested, middling student. I performed more than adequately at games, while my brother was possessed of a consistent clumsiness. I enjoyed the company of many friends as a boy; poor Manfred was solitary. Finally, while it was said that I was acceptable in appearance, Manfred suffered a nose of some size and protruding teeth. Worst of all, the boy seemed both to accept his

ugliness and despise himself for it, for he dressed carelessly and was often so slovenly in his hygiene that he could be known by his smell in a dark room.

Manfred's surly attitude spread to color his entire life. Most German boys are

THE CANDLESTICK MAKER

expected to find a master and begin apprenticeship in a trade by thirteen or fourteen. Thanks to our father's position as magistrate, I had become scrivener for a local barrister, work which I enjoyed and for which I seemed suited. However, when Manfred reached the proper age, he could find no interest in any pursuit. Several craftsmen in our town, Hansdorf, yielded to our father's influence and took him on as apprentice. No connection survived a month. Each in turn, the tradesmen informed Papa that Manfred showed no interest in the work and an indifference to other employees which bordered on contempt. None could keep him.

Our gentle mother was much distressed by Manfred's attitude, and our father was disgusted. He constantly voiced angry conviction that his second son would be a lifelong *Schmarotzer*, a parasite living off the family. With every reversal Papa's frustration rose. I feared that he would make good his frequent threat to expel Manfred from our house.

How relieved was I when, at supper one evening, Manfred announced that he had found a position on his own. Herr Strigoi, the town's *Kerzenmacher*, or candlemaker, had accepted him as apprentice.

Our mother seemed alarmed by the news and voiced her worries. Herr Strigoi had worked in Hansdorf for many years – indeed, from before I was born. Never, though, had he joined town society; he almost never left his shop, where he also lived, or the foundry behind it where he created his wares. He was brusque, if not impolite, with customers, and

pervasive gossip held that he supplied more than candles to the discreet – odd intoxicants, even abortifacients. Some, offended and frightened by the foul smoke escaping his chimney at all hours, whispered that the old man was in actuality a gypsy involved in the evil arts. After all, Mama said, did we know what “Strigoi” meant in the Romany language?

“Sorcerer,” Manfred laughed. “*Ein Zauberer*. See, mother? I have heard the same foolishness as you.”

Papa scoffed. “Sorcerer, gypsy ... what matter? What better fit for such as you,” he scowled at Manfred, “than such a man?” That was as close to satisfaction with Manfred as I had seen him show of late. So the matter was settled, but I saw – with some amusement – our mother cross herself.

Manfred seemed to take to the work at Strigoi’s shop. Neighbors trading there reported to our parents that he was efficient in attendance to their needs and courteous. He showed enthusiasm for the craft, bringing large, antique books home from the candle shop which he avidly studied in his room. When I intruded past his closed door, I would often find him engrossed in some dusty tome or making notations in a thick journal he had begun to keep. Upon noticing me he would close whichever volume he was reading, deal brusquely with my needs and shoo me out, no doubt returning at once to his studies. The books, I surmised, were Herr Strigoi’s, though I wondered what about candlemaking would bring print to so many pages. When once I asked about the subject he studied, Manfred answered only with a request that I attend to my own business and allow him to attend to his.

I shrugged away Manfred’s secrecy as merely another eccentricity. At least our family meals were no longer soured by Papa’s anger at my brother, although angry he remained, mostly at the Jewish bankers in the town and the foolish lawyers, among them my master, who assailed his patience in court.

Three years passed in this relative peace. Both my employment and Manfred’s proceeded smoothly, and another matter came to the fore of my life. A wonderful *Frauelein*,

daughter of my master’s partner, visited our offices and left with my heart in her pocket. Brigitte was in my eyes ideal – intelligent, beautiful, and good-hearted. She became a regular visitor and looked kindly upon my attentions. In time she accepted my proposal, and I brought her to the family home to announce our engagement.

To my relief, Papa said nothing critical about my bride to be. Mama, for her part, seemed delighted, and immediately instituted what she called a new family tradition. She bade Brigitte select an item from her own mother’s jewelry, a welcome, she said, for the new *Frau* Henreid. Blushing, pleased, Brigitte chose a beautiful gold ring. I had the joy of slipping it onto her finger. “*Ein Verlobungsring*,” I laughed – an engagement token.

Manfred seemed uncharacteristically moved. Since his employment with Strigoi he had grown more and more distant from the family, spending all of his private time with his books and journal. My engagement seemed to draw him back. He grasped me, effusive with emotion. “Klaus the lucky!” he exclaimed happily. “Klaus the *gesegnet*! Oh to be so blessed!”

Our wedding was scheduled for a few weeks hence when Manfred broached the subject of a wedding gift. He had spoken to Herr Strigoi, and had been promised the most elegant candle in the shop as his present. “A candle?” Papa scoffed. “What sort of wedding gift is that?”

My brother tensed, but swiftly regained his smile. I was to bring Brigitte by the *Kerzenladen* to make her choice. We made the short trip to Herr Strigoi’s shop the next day. I was relieved, as we approached, to see that the workshop’s infamous chimney was not, at the time, dispensing its fetid smoke. Within, the smell of wax was diluted by scents of roses, pleasant grasses and evergreen, and the plainness of the counter by rows of ornate candles. Behind the counter stood the proprietor, Herr Strigoi, attended by my nervous brother.

I had seen Herr Strigoi in passing, of course, but his reclusiveness had kept him

hidden from view for several years. Our entrance into his shop was my first sight of the old man since Manfred had begun his apprenticeship. Quite short, a slight man whose small features were crammed within a heavy beard of dirty gray, upon Manfred's introduction he afforded me a brief nod, but his gaze brightened when it settled on Brigitte. "Yes," he said, his voice deep but soft within his beard. "I see." He took Brigitte's hand in his, raised it to his lips for a heartbeat, and regarded it admiringly as he let it go. "Charmed, *junge Dame. Ich leibe dein Hautfarbe.*"

Brigitte's smile blossomed wider for a moment at this praise for her complexion, and she blushed. I felt a moment of puerile jealousy, and another when the old man took a lock of her golden hair between her fingers. When she looked amazed, Strigoi withdrew his hand and faced Manfred, saying merely, "*Gut. Es ist möglich.*"

"It is possible"? Strigoi turned back to Brigitte, smiling now. He spread his arms to encompass the candles before him on the counter. "*Fraulein,*" he said expansively, "in honor of your wedding to this lucky man, please choose any of these. I regret I can offer no better than my best work."

Brigitte and I examined the candles. They were magnificent! Not mere cylinders of wax, but beauteous columns bedecked with multiple colors and tiny, precise figures and settings – forests, castles, crucifixions, dragons, frolicking cherubs and satyrs, lifelike, delightful. As we studied each, Manfred came forth with enthused commentary. "A pillar ... imbued with the scent of *immergrün* ... Herr Strigoi's new process ... note the colors in this nativity ..." He spoke with pride and excitement, a pleasure to see. Brigitte was awed, and baffled over which candle to choose, but finally selected a woodland scene of green and ivory, children at play beneath delicate branches among colorful flowers. Herr Strigoi smiled again, asked Manfred to see to wrapping the gift, and with another bow to my beautiful intended, disappeared quickly out the back door. "The workshop," Manfred

explained. "The vats. The kiln. They call to him at any moment."

Our wedding was small, at the house of Brigitte's parents. We moved into an apartment in the house adjacent to my family's, and for a season, all was well. In the spring, however, Herr Strigoi vanished.

Manfred told the town officials that he had no warning, heard no word of farewell. One morning he had arrived for work to find an open, unoccupied shop. The upstairs living quarters and library – source of the many books he had studied – were empty; none of the little man's clothing or effects were missing. The bank informed the investigators that the candle shop's accounts had not been touched, negating my thought that old Strigoi had disappeared to elude debts.

Suspicion quickly formed that the candlemaker had met with violence. Eyes turned to Manfred, but the constable could find no evidence against him. *Er ist weg* was the final conclusion, he is gone, and there matters rested. While the investigation progressed, and the shop was closed, Manfred endured the idle time engrossed, as always, in the old books.

Before the authorities cleared his way to relight the kiln, he announced that he would be taking up residence in the candle shop and leaving the family home. Mama made an admirable appearance of regret. Papa, predictably, came forth with a coarse comment of being well shed of Manfred, but for once I saw no hurt in my brother's demeanor. Instead he asked me to help him change the sign over the shop's door. M HENREID --
KERZENMACHER.

I took the opportunity to explore the house. Upstairs was a small kitchen, dining room, bedroom, and library. I found this last room astonishing: shelves of antique books floor to ceiling on three walls, naught but a straight-backed chair and a writing desk against the fourth. On the desk I noted the thick journal in which Manfred, for years, had been writing. Dare I admit I was tempted to open and read it before Manfred's call brought me away?

He called me into the bedroom, where stood a wall closet where Herr Strigoi had hung his meagre clothing. Manfred pulled the clothes free of hangers and shelves and piled them onto the bed. He bade me help him carry them to the kiln for burning. The workshop occupied a separate building some yards behind the main house, and. Manfred showed me – with some pride – the large vats where wax was melted, the smaller ones where color and scent were added, the tables where molds and tools gave the finished candles their artfulness, and the kiln itself, which seemed to me dangerously old and rusted. “Herr Strigoi,” Manfred said, “used animal fat to meld with the tallow. That is why this place smells so disgusting. I will change that, blend in paraffin instead. Paraffin is made from coal and tar and is less repellant to the nose. I have stearic acid on order. It has a higher melting point than plain wax. My candles will last longer. But I ... I must first use up the last of Herr Strigoi’s fat.”

I joked, “You are yourself a strigoi!”

“You know your Romany!” Manfred rejoined. “Yes, the right oils, the right colors, the right fat, the right ... Can I carry on Strigoi’s work? In time I will excel it!”

It was not long until the constables allowed Manfred to resume work. Once again we saw and smelled the foul smoke surging, day and night, from the workshop chimney.

More time went by, weeks, months. Brigitte and I were happy, my parents continued on as before. Then a winter day came when, at suppertime, my mother rushed to our apartment to call us to the family table. Manfred was there, with startling news. He had taken a wife.

Her name, he told the astonished family, was Minka. She was an orphan girl from a distant district of Germany, working in the town nearest Hansdorf when Manfred visited her employer on business. He had been instantly taken, he said, with her sweetness and simple beauty, and after several return

journeys found to his joy that his affections were returned. On impulse they had wed. She would arrive at the candle shop within the week.

My brother bade all to come meet her, warning us humorously of her shyness. He begged of our mother one favor. He asked Mama to allow him to select the piece Minka would be gifted from our grandmother’s jewelry. He knew exactly which item he wanted her to have – a silver necklace he had always admired. Mama, still in a state of surprise, agreed.

A date was set for the visit in the coming week, and Manfred rushed off, leaving a thunderstruck family in his wake. “What must she be like?” Mama wondered.

“To be with Manfred?” Papa sneered. “Desperate – or as big a fool as he. Only a fool could tolerate that boy! ‘Candlemaker’ ...” He all but spat in disgust.

Papa’s attitude had not improved by the day of our visit. Our ride to the candle shop was accompanied by sarcastic suppositions about “this ‘Minka.’” “If not hare-lipped or goggle-eyed, then surely she’ll be plain to the point of hideous.” No one argued with him; we all had similar worries.

But as we entered the shop, cheer infused me. A happy bell over the door announced us. I saw that the walls had been brightened by fresh paint. On the counter and tables about the room Herr Strigoi’s artistic candles had been joined by a garden of festive roses, tulips and buttercups, vibrant with color, the wax of their constituency shimmering artificial dewdrops, glimmering in the flames. The faux garden exuded a light fragrance that filled the room without being cloying. Mostly, we were invigorated by the remarkable coolness of the air, almost as chill as outside. “*Wunderschönen!*” Brigitte exclaimed. “*But kuhl,*” Mama added.

Behind the counter and up the stairs, the door to the living quarters opened. Manfred shouted an enthused greeting and came down ... with his Minka. I felt a quick



smile bloom, for she was beautiful, a tiny soul with a pretty pinkness to her round, dimpled face, bright blonde hair framing it, dark red lips in a hesitant smile, and large eyes of a luminous blue. I should be forgiven for noting the ripeness of her diminutive figure in her pretty red dress. She reminded me instantly of Brigitte, who smiled beside me. Father, thank the Christ, was silent.

Minka greeted us with a slight, funny curtsy and, in a voice light as air said "*Willkommen, mein Herren und Damen!* It is a lovely day!" She did not step forward to meet Mama and Brigitte, neither rude nor standoffish but shy, as if a child.

Her hug thwarted, Mama took Minka's little hand in her own and said, "Minka, welcome to this family," in a tone that was, as far as I could tell, sincere. "A tradition, child. From my late mother and me, to the newest *Frau* Henreid!" She withdrew her hands, leaving our grandmother's silver necklace draped over Minka's fingers. The girl stared at it in wonder. Manfred gently took the necklace and fastened it about his bride's slim, pink neck. Minka touched it and said, "*Danke, Leibe Schwiegermutter.* It is lovely!"

Manfred urged us up the stairs to the small dining room, a bit warmer. Minka served cakes and tea with a sweet clumsiness, but nothing was spilled, and I could tell that Mama and Brigitte were both amused and charmed. Minka ate or drank nothing and Manfred answered most of the questions put to her, innocuous queries as to family (none) and past life (residing with and working for a family in the next town).

Papa sat silently during the chat, eying Minka while he munched on his cake. As the ladies were putting away the tea things he refused Manfred's offer to see the workshop. The rusty old kiln was lit, now, Manfred said, and he had returned to work. "Herr Strigoi taught me much," he boasted. "Much magic!"

"Gypsy magic," our father scoffed. "Wife! Come!"

Our mother said little about Minka. The girl was sweet, she allowed, and her coloring and perfume were very like Brigitte's,

but so quiet – and she worried that Manfred kept the house and shop too chilly. Minka's hand had been icy cold. Brigitte, when we were abed, was more serious: she felt Manfred's little *frau* was *einfaltig* – simple. I shied from the idea, but only until I saw Minka and Manfred again, a few weeks hence.

It was winter's last and most desperate grip on our land, a day of surpassing cold. Returning from an errand in the neighboring town, shivering on my master's horse, I spied a small figure on the road approaching Hansdorf, gazing into the bare limbs of the trees about us.

As I came closer I saw that it was Minka, clad to my horror in no more than a flannel nightgown, slippers sunken into the snow, a thin shawl on her shoulders and a flimsy scarf tied about her yellow hair. I called to her through chattering teeth. She turned and, her smile constant, approached my horse. I cried, "Why are you outside in this cold?" and she replied "I am fine. The trees are lovely."

I extended my hand. "Come up behind me! We'll get you to a fire!"

She took my hand. Through my glove she felt chilled to the bone. I lifted her easily to sit behind me. "Oh, no fire," she answered. "I am fine. The snow is lovely."

With my slight nudge to his ribs our poor horse moved ahead. I was a bit frantic. What was this girl doing out in the elements on such a day, with so little to protect her? I heard Manfred's sudden call. My brother came rushing upon the road, his eyes flitting this way, that way, searching. They lit on me, and then Minka, and he rushed to lift her from the horse. "Why did you leave the house?" he stammered. Minka only replied, in the same happy tone as before, "The day is lovely. *Herr* Klaus is kind. *Danke, bruder.*" Her silver necklace twinkled in the light.

Manfred threw his cloak about the girl's slim body. As he hurried her away he turned to me. "On your word," he cried, "say nothing to anyone!"

I did not. Brigitte's worry seemed proven. Minka was quite childlike, and perhaps limited. But in my eyes that only underscored her innocence and sweetness. Someday she

might be a burden to Manfred, but I remembered his bitter words: a man has the right to be loved. I would not spread such an ugly tale about the one in whom he placed such hope. Even if she was *einfaeltig*, even if I had not seen her breath fogging in the cold or scarcely felt her hands holding my shoulders.

The winter faded and no one in the family heard anything about, or from, Manfred or Minka. Spring came on, and as its weeks went by heat rose above our region of Germany – a bad, humid heat, promising a cauldron of a summer. Tempers across Hansdorf were ripe, but still I was surprised when I entered my parents' home one morning and found the dining room rattling with shouts. Manfred and our father were in a furious exchange. My brother sounded desperate to the point of panic, our father angry and stubborn, as always. Our mother sat cowed at a corner of the table; Papa perched on the edge of the head chair, staring at Manfred, who stumbled about the room in agitation. He spoke urgently to Papa, trying to get the old man to look at the diagrams and text in an American magazine he held. Its lead article, he said, dealt with new methods for creating ice, and he intended to use its technology to cool his workshop and house to bearable temperatures in the summer. He indicated diagrams of mechanisms designed for such purposes. One could be constructed in the house should a source be found for energy, and he said that a water wheel in the stream behind might suffice.

"It is about refrigeration," Manfred pleaded. "cooling a home or factory in the summer. There is an inventor in Munich – he does not use ice – it tells you here – his mechanism cools through the evaporation of ether inside a drum – like beer chills in a stein. He has cooled mines, slaughterhouses, breweries ... I only need a good word, your expression of confidence – to the bankers ..."

Now Papa laughed, without humor. "Oh, so I am to go humbly to the Jew bankers and put my credit at risk, for this silly dream, for you, you and your simpleminded --"

"Papa!" Mama protested. Manfred shuddered at the slur against his Minka, but went on.

"It ... it only requires power – a water wheel in the stream behind my shop – Papa, it is a thing of the future ..."

Again Papa laughed, mockingly. "*Die Zukunft.*" My candle-making son lectures me about 'the future.' He makes candles," he scoffed, shaking his head, "when every house in Hansdorf is lit by oil lamps or gas. Have you heard? A man in America is luminating whole cities with lightning!" He chopped a scornful hand. "Your gypsy master taught you a profession a hundred years behind the times!"

Manfred had not moved his eyes from our father. All color had left his face. "My candles ... are art ... miracles ..."

"Art? Miracles?" Our father sneered. "I have already spoken to the Jews. There is almost nothing left of the gypsy's capital. You are running into debt, more and more debt!" He thrust his florid face close to Manfred's paled countenance. "Do you think me so senile I cannot see your plan? Run this *Witz* into the dirt and live off me!"

Manfred stood by the table, wordless.

"*Nein!*" Papa swore, "Let your wax flowers wilt! Let your *Blodian* sweat!"

Blodian. Idiot. Manfred flinched. He stepped forward. I grasped his arm.

"You foul, filthy old man," Manfred gasped.

I spoke. "Let us go, *bruder*. Come." With a final glower at our father, Manfred stalked from the room. I followed. He stood in the road, rolling the American magazine in his hands as if crushing a throat, "Forgive him, Manfred," I said. "It is his dotage that speaks. We are all delighted with Minka."

"Minka must stay cool!" my brother said. "I ... I have the right to be loved."

I said, "So, you and I shall go to the bankers. We shall show them this ice machine of yours, convince them to lend you the money ourselves ..."

"No," Manfred said, defeated. "Papa is right. They will mock a mere dauber in wax. Ice. I need ice. Klaus – can you stake us to a few tubs of ice?"

"I can and will."

I took our parents' horse and carriage and drove with Manfred to the icehouse through vicious heat that sapped one's breath. "Cannot Minka take this heat?" My question was met with a long silence. "No," Manfred finally said. "She will ... become very ill ... without a cool house. The ice ... should help."

We reached the icehouse. I purchased two large containers of crushed ice which we loaded into the carriage. Manfred asked me to whip up the horse and hurry us to his shop. "I fear ... it's just a feeling ..." When we reached the *Kerzenladen* he rushed inside, leaving me to haul in the heavy tubs. I could not blame him; the shop was grotesquely hot. A few of the wax flowers on display were drooping, and one or two dropped molten color onto the floor.

"Minka!" Manfred rushed up the stairs. "*Mein Gott!* Too late? Too late?" A second later his shout became a scream. "Klaus! The ice! The ice!"

I struggled up the stairs with my burden. Already the ice had begun to liquefy. I all but fell into the bedroom.

Minka lay atop a coverlet, dressed in a flannel nightgown, her large blue eyes unblinking and unmoving, fixed upon the ceiling. Our grandmother's silver necklace lay skewed upon the shining pink smoothness of her throat. "Too late?" Manfred screamed again. He threw a sheet over Minka's tiny figure and began to ladle ice onto her.

"Keep doing this!" he cried, and careened out of the bedroom. I obeyed. I looked with horror on Minka's motionless face. "Fever!" I thought. "Typhus!"

Manfred rushed back into the room, in his hands the thick journal he had kept in his apprenticeship. "Don't stop!" he shouted, and sat quickly by Minka's head. He opened wide the huge book and flogged the pages to a specific sheet. "More ice," he croaked. He bent his head close to Minka's and, reading from the book, began whispering into her ear a verse, perhaps a prayer; I could not make out his words. I ladled the ice onto the still figure beneath the sheet, my hands stinging from cold. Manfred finished his prayer, or verse, and stared desperately at Minka's face. He read the

page anew, louder, more insistently. I still could not understand the gist.

Finally, as he finished again, Minka's body flexed beneath the sheet. She shuddered, gasped, and ever so slowly moved her gaze to Manfred's weeping face. I heard her gentle, bell-like voice utter a soft word or two. One was *Schoen* ... "lovely."

All tension, all strength fled Manfred's body. He collapsed. His journal slid to the floor, and his head fell to the pillow beside Minka's. I could hear him weep. I went to his side and picked up the heavy book. "I will bring in the rest of the ice," I said quietly.

While I did so, Manfred did not move; Minka seemed peacefully asleep beneath the mound of ice spread across her. It has to be the typhus, I thought, and left the room, taking the journal. The open door to Herr Strigoi's library tempted me within.

Few of the old tomes on Strigoi's shelves had titles on their spines, and those that did were seldom in German. One I could make out – barely – read *Unaussprechlichen Kulturen*. Another, all but falling apart, *Necronomicon Kommentiert*. A third, *Leben und Tod: Geheimnisse der Golem*. With a guilty glance towards the silent hallway, I placed Manfred's journal on the desk, opened the volume and thumbed through the hand-wrought pages. The words and images baffled me. I recognized only a pentagram, the blasphemous five-pointed star, each angle annotated in Manfred's impossible hand. A phrase popped from the illegible mess that made me cringe: *Fleisch und Knochen Wiedergeben*. I found the page my brother had, just now, read to Minka, but could decipher only the first few terrible words: *Im Licht Satans*. I slammed the book closed. Without a glance back towards the bedroom, I fled to the family carriage and fair flogged the poor horse home.

For many days I remained shaken by what had transpired in the candle shop. My work grew slipshod, so much so that my master gave me warnings. I felt a new distance from Brigitte, though she needed me more than ever, for she was in the family way. In her state she saw my confused gloom as a personal

rejection, and some nights cried herself into sleep as I lay silent and helpless beside her, tormented by thoughts I could not relate. I considered taking my terrors to the confessional, but what could I share with the priest? A few absurd titles from Strigoï's library – *Unspeakable Cults*, *Necronomicon Commentaries*, *Life and Death: Mysteries of the Golem*. A despicable entry in Manfred's journal – "Rendering the flesh and bone" and, worse, "By Satan's light." Meaningless, mad drivel! Yet they conveyed to me the depths of my poor brother's dilemma.

Spring merged into summer, and the heat grew. The iceman came to tell me that Manfred was purchasing more ice every week, on credit, but his bill would soon come due. I pledged whatever help I could give, though I knew it could not last with our child on its way. We heard nothing of either Manfred or Minka, although the candle shop remained open and smoke continued to flow from the workshop chimney. Until, one Sunday morning, Brigitte and I were at table in my parents' home, the ladies chattering happily about the child to come, Papa silent, deep into his dotage. Quite suddenly, a huge percussive shock rattled the house, alike to close thunder. I rushed outside to see an oily billow of thick smoke rising in the direction of the candle shop.

"The kiln!" I shouted. "That damnable kiln!"

I ran with neighbors towards the column of smoke and arrived just as the fire brigade began its bucket line. It was already useless to fight the blaze; the workshop was a ruin expelling clouds of grey-black smoke and tall, hellish flames. I saw that the fire had leapt to the roof of the house and that it was already

smoking. As I rushed for the doorway the windows of the bottom floor blew out in a fetid cough. I pushed aside those who tried to impede me and crashed into the searing heat and the stink of wax.

Flames danced freely about me as I careened through the shop. The artistic candles, the cherubs, the satyrs, the garden of false flowers drooled to the floor in shapeless, bubbling puddles. I screamed Manfred's name. From atop the stairs I heard his reply, a sick, wordless keen.

Heavy smoke poured from the stairs. I knew they would collapse at any moment. I rushed up to Manfred, who lay against the doorjamb, his clothes a'smolder, deep burns marring his face and hands. On his lap his

journal lay open to a page he held crumpled in his fist. I shouted again his name, but his eyes did not light on me. He stared with a wide mad gaze down the hall.

I staggered down the corridor through the wretched smoke. Within the library flames writhed obscenely. Huge volumes fell heavily from the collapsing shelves, exploding into shards of crisping paper as they struck the floor. I found the bedroom, fogged with heat and smoke and

smell, and felt my way to the head of the bed. I saw what was there and fell to my knees.

"Not typhus!" I screamed. "*Die Hexenkunst! Sorcery!*"

I reached onto the smoking coverlet. Gingerly, for it burned my fingers, I freed my grandmother's silver necklace from the liquid mix of wax and bone, fused with flannel, that lay there.

As I felt the first shudder of madness within me, I heard a single, final, whispered word.

"*Schoen.*"
Lovely.



A last, lost LOC from Martin Morse Wooster

P.O. Box 8093
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December 26, 2017.

SF fandom was rocked in mid-November, 2022, by the hit-&-run accident that claimed fan writer and author Martin Morse Wooster, a frequent contributor to *File: 770* and many other fan publications. *Challenger* had a letter of comment from almost 5 years ago which had somehow become lost. So we run it now, in memoriam to an outstanding member of the SF world.

Dear Guy and Rosie,

Many thanks for *Challenger* 41. Unlike Chris Garcia, I couldn't dream of going on the Orleans Orbit. When I was seven, I went on a Tilt-a-Whirl and learned very quickly that I don't like being on anything that spins around quickly. When I was at the San Francisco Worldcon in 1993, I spent some time at the San Francisco County Fair, which is essentially what would happen if a group of weirdoes in that city were told to put on a county fair. (They had animals, which were all made out of wood.) They had a ride called an Orbitron where you are strapped into a device that spun you around and then upside down. After one round of being upside down, I shouted, "Let me out!" Since that time, I've managed to avoid all rides where the key is being spun around or having excessive gravitational forces whack you. I can handle roller coasters, as long as they are small and old.

Tom McGovern's memoir about being a Jehovah's Witness was very interesting. I'm glad he talked about his experiences at length, but I don't really have that much to say about his writing, except to add that I was impressed with his candor at describing scary experiences. I'm glad he turned out all right.

I'm sure the Olney Theatre has productions as high quality as Rich Lynch says they are. It's a little far for people like me who don't drive. I get to more theatre than I used to, and try to write about musicals and plays with fantasy content for *File 770*, which has my reviews of *Disney's The Little Mermaid* and *Dr. Seuss's How the Grinch Stole Christmas! The Musical*. Arena Stage, which is our big regional theatre, has a musical every year. I didn't see this year's production of *The Pajama Game*, but did see their 2016 production of *Carousel* and their 2015 production of *Oliver!* *Carousel* was a very well done production of Rodgers and Hammerstein's most depressing work, based on a play by Ferenc Molnar that Puccini wanted to turn into an opera, except that Molnar wouldn't sell him the rights. While *Carousel* was relatively straightforward, *Oliver!* was updated to the present and made multiracial; the lead female singer, whose voice was excellent, had a mohawk haircut. I would have preferred a more traditional production, but I'd give *Oliver!* a B plus. I also saw the Shakespeare Theatre production of *Kiss Me Kate* in 2015, which was uniformly excellent and had a cast of 22 singing Cole Porter songs that got away with rhyming "Portland, Ore" and "bore."

I remember some of my dreams, which I won't recount here. But I can't say I've ever remembered a dream well enough to write about it for over 300 words. I'm glad Guy has the facility to remember dreams in such detail, and that writing them down helps him.

Yours in fandom,

Martin Morse Wooster.

