

CHALLENGER

39



Challenger #39

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Cover by **RON SANDERS**

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"Beasts"
Richard Wilbur

Beasts in their major freedom
Slumber in peace tonight. The gull on his ledge
Dreams in the guts of himself the moon-plucked waves below,
And the sunfish leans on a stone, slept
By the lyric water;

In which the spotless feet
Of deer make dulcet splashes, and to which
The ripped mouse, safe in the owl's talon, cries
Concordance. Here there is no such harm
And no such darkness

As the self-same moon observes
Where, warped in window-glass, it sponsors now
The werewolf's painful change. Turning his head away
On the sweaty bolster, he tries to remember
The mood of manhood,

But lies at last, as always,
Letting it happen, the fierce fur soft to his face,
Hearing with sharper ears the wind's exciting minors,
The leaves' panic, and the degradation
Of the heavy streams.

Meantime, at high windows
Far from thicket and pad-fall, suitors of excellence
Sigh and turn from their work to construe again the painful
Beauty of heaven, the lucid moon
And the risen hunter,

Making such dreams for men
As told will break their hearts as always, bringing
Monsters into the city, crows on the public statues,
Navies fed to the fish in the dark
Unbridled waters.



*... bringing
Monsters into the city, crows on the
public statues,
navies fed to the fish in the dark
unbridled waters*

"Monsters into the City"

An editorial

"Beasts", by the American poet Richard Wilbur, is possibly my favorite poem. Its vivid imagery, its identification of nature with agony, are irresistible. I think I most appreciate the poet's generosity in including in his verse a genre image, the werewolf, a fabled bridge between man and beast, and through him demonstrating the painful transformative power of nature. "Beasts" is in some ways a cautionary poem: the world, and nature, are by no means pastoral and sweet. They churn with chaos and anguish. The artistry that embraces and expresses the world does not comfort; it excites, degrades, and panics. It *breaks your heart* ... as always.

Challenger #39 has no such ambition, but nevertheless we steal Wilbur's most startling phrase for this issue's theme. At the close of the last issue I had something more peaceable in mind. Rosy's stated ambition to write her autobiography in science fiction fandom – remember, she's second generation, born into it – inspired me to a theme of "The Family *Of* and the Family *In* Science Fiction." I imagined an issue rife with love, tranquility and familial grace. And eventually it will come.

But another influence raised its head from "the sweaty bolster": Ron Sanders' stunner of a cover, a painting evocative of innumerable monster epics from the 1950s and before. In the way some artwork does when you behold it, the illo *compelled* its immediate use and shot its influence throughout the zine its fronts. Maybe that's because the image itself establishes a "bridge" between the monstrous and the human; this creature may be menacing, but he's wearing *Speed-os*. But probably because, like all of Sanders' work, it's a thrilling piece of art.

Our contributors and I attack the theme from several angles in this "Jack Benny" *Challenger*.

Monster movie aficionado Jim Ivers offers another survey of genre movies of the past, this time the monsters of the 1950s. He evokes the joy of a more innocent age – and the cheerful self-derision of our genre at its silliest. But I wouldn't trade these flicks for all the *Citizen Kanes* and *Birdmans* – I suppose that should be *Birdmen* (loved that movie) – on Earth or off. Thanks to the ever-reliable Charlie Williams for his wonderful work illustrating a classic.

No *Challenger* is complete without poetry. I begin this issue with verse and poet Mike Estabrook provides lines devoted to our favorite movie monstrosities. Artwork is by Randy Cleary, another hero of Southern fandom and its fanzines, and New Orleans' beloved Nancy Mayberry, whose artwork graced the first Nolacon II progress report back in 1987 and the cover of Mike Resnick's special B.E.M. anthology, published for that con.

I guess Howard Phillips Lovecraft brought monsters into the countryside more than he did the city, but we can stretch the point enough to hail the late Meade Frierson and his epic fanzine, *HPL*. My THANKS to brother SFPAns Joe Moudry and Ned Brooks for their invaluable assistance with this piece Joe reminded me of Meade's own account in *SFPA* of the genesis and growth of *HPL*, and Ned sent me an e-copy. (Br'er Brooks also helped me find a copy of *HPL* to work from, as my own is buried in storage.) We all loved Meade, we all admire his book, but if there is quality in the article, it all belongs to these hale denizens of the South.

Steven Silver and Mike Resnick are both Chicago boys, so perhaps it's inevitable that each should seize upon football as his subtheme and "Monsters of the Midway" as his title. By the way, if Randy Cleary's artwork for Mike's piece seems familiar, you may be remembering this → movie poster for the original *Frankenstein*. Righteous work, Randy.



The monster Joe Major brings into the city for this *Challenger* is one he has dealt with often and delightfully in these pages. You'd have to mess up mightily to have Julie Schwartz' "Favorite Guy" turn down a Joker story! Speaking ofThe Fox series *Gotham* is pretty point- and lifeless nine-tenths of the time – doing little with the great villains-to-be it's introduced: Catwoman, Penguin, the Riddler, Two-Face and the Scarecrow. But when, in "The Blind Fortune Teller", the paler-than-pale mama's boy Jerome Nordstrom raises his face from the table where he supposedly weeps – and the Clown Prince of Crazy leers back at us – we have to hope that it's only a matter of time till we get *righteous* Bat-vibes going.

You may think it's in *imitation* of Mike and Joe that I give a shot to my own fan fiction in this issue – "The Thing: Part II" – but let's be kind to yhos the editor. Let's just say that their example *inspired* me to hack out a fan fiction that I've been thinking over for years. I make no claim for it except to repeat words I've said a dozen dozen times by now: I have no talent and I have a Masters of Fine Arts to prove it, and hey, I pay for the printing. The piece follows immediately.

I *do* have a personal and much more serious writing project going. Revamping my M.F.A. thesis from 40 years ago, it's a tale my grandfather recounted of his boyhood to my dad and myself. A *human* monster strides through that story, and perhaps, methinks, dealing with the savage critters of imagination will sharpen my perspective. After all, when you say "monsters," you're talking about people's perceptions of monstrosity, for monstrosity, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. (At my rate of progress, expect my story in another 40 years.)

You notice that *Challenger* has restricted its understanding of monsters to fictional beings – with the exception of Mr. Silver's gridiron behemoths. It's not that I wasn't tempted to write about the figurative monsters with whom I dealt as a public defender, it's just that lately I've found monstrous people more depressing than interesting – mostly, I'm afraid, petty, obvious, and vulgar. Monstrous beings of imagination, on the other claw – in the wits and the hands of talented artists, *they* can be metaphors. *They* can convey truth. *They* can teach.

Which reminds me of another poem evoking a menace from the movies, Fred Chappell's "Burning the Frankenstein Monster" from his great cycle, *Midquest*. (An earlier poem in that cycle is addressed to me.) Recalling the epic moment when Colin Clive's Dr. Frankenstein throws symbolic light onto his creation, only to snatch it away, and Karloff's beautifully wrought reaction, Fred writes "What would *we* give to undergo in our latter years the virgin / Onslaught of light? To be born again into light, / To be raised from the grave."



Not everything in a *Challenger* can be monstrous. Consistent *Chall* pal Greg Benford chimes in with a wise piece on the endangered SF magazines. In addition to his Joker story, Joe Major critiques an SF masterpiece I haven't yet read – and now, must. Taral Wayne's "Ill-Winds Still Blow" was originally slated for John Purcell's *Askance*, where its prequel, "Ill Winds Blow", appeared some time ago, but by our good fortune and John's ill luck, shows here. Taral also directed Walt Wentz' latest bit o'whimsy, "One Man's Poison", our way, so multiple layers of thanks to him.

The foregoing notwithstanding, *Challenger* usually doesn't print fiction. Yet almost every day, a fictional submission shows up in my inbox. I usually forward stories from strangers to Dan Hollifield, editor of the fine netzine, *Aphelion*, but I couldn't figure out why our zine is so popular with newbie writers. Now I have. Turns out that "Challenger" is the fourth most clicked-upon website in science fiction. No wonder writers seeking recognition gravitate here!

This attention has nothing or next to nothing to do with us and our poor fanzine, of course. "Challenger" can denote many things – a lost space shuttle, an Arthur Conan Doyle character, a make of automobile, a tractor, a British tank, a sexy game character ("Challenger Ahri"), a car lift, an executive jet, a model aircraft carrier, a brand of soccer duds, a division of Little League, also of youth football, fancy bicycles, even *sex toys* – you should see the things; they're frightening. Apparently whenever someone clicks on one of those items, he or she is directed, uhh, here. I give you my word that when I named this zine in 1993, I did *not* have such borrowed fame in mind.



This illo is by Carl Gafford, and dates 'way back to 1974, when Gaff and I were both junior woodchucks at DC Comics. It's based on a dream I had of being a monster of some sort chasing Carl Kolchak, or did you get that already?

Follows *my* dose of whimsy for this issue, a sequel to *The Thing from Another World*. I'm not good but I've got guts.

The road wound upwards through the wooded Berkeley Hills. To the west, San Francisco Bay and the Golden Gate Bridge marked the skyline with vivid beauty. I'd never been up to U.C.'s Cyclotron complex before, but as I stopped at the security gate and presented my credentials – *Ned Scott, American Press* – the fresh experience and the glorious scenery were far from my mind. I kept asking myself, *Why didn't Carrington testify?* It would be the first question I'd ask when I faced the scientist himself.

The week before, I had attended the court martial of Air Force Captain Patrick Hendry at the Presidio in San Francisco. Captain Hendry had faced charges of exceeding his authority during the alien invasion incident at the scientific research station near the North Pole, charges pushed by Dr. Arthur Carrington, Nobel-winning physicist and the lord high muckety-muck at the research camp. A monster from another planet – a human-sized vegetable – had crawled out of a crashed spaceship and had, encased in ice, had been brought back to the facility. It thawed out and, since it lived on blood, had murdered two of the scientists and threatened the rest. The airmen had killed it – fried it like so much cauliflower – and Dr. Carrington had blown a Cadillac-sized gasket. His only thought was for the scientific information promised by this star-faring “super-carrot”; even after it had smashed him to a bloody pulp, he was still mad.

The good doctor had pressured the Pentagon to bring Hendry to trial, and such was his prestige that they'd done so. But without

explanation, he had not shown up at court, and the day had gone Hendry's way. He and the rest of his crew were cleared of all charges and restored to their status as America's – no, *humanity's* heroes, to quote my own article on the subject.

That was the latest of several Ned Scott pieces on the “Thing from another world.” Thanks to the phenomenal luck of the Irish – my great-grandmother was an O'Herlihy – I had been there for the whole magilla – the battle at the North Pole and the court martial, and now – suddenly – I'd been summoned to talk with Dr. Carrington at his new post at UC Berkeley's Cyclotron.



The guard at the gate told me that I was expected and gave me directions. I drove on into America's most terrifying research facility. It looked like any other college campus – blank-walled buildings with numbers above the entryways, unkempt and unshaven chubby genius-boys in wrinkled suits

toting briefcases to and fro – except for the soldiers. There were soldiers – M-1s at port arms – on every corner, and their eyes followed me, an unfamiliar presence, as I drove past.

The Cyclotron building was huge, round, green – a great flat silo where, instead of storing grain, they made hydrogen bombs. I parked in a space marked for visitors and sat,

absorbing the moment. With everything I had seen in my life, from the execution of Ruth Snyder to the invasion of Okinawa to the horrifying Arctic adventure of the year before, being this close to raw atomic research was a new experience for me. I could almost hear the atoms

THE THING – PART II

Fan fiction by
Guy Lillian – Part III

smashing together. Actually, I was only hearing a familiar voice.

“Mr. Scott? Hello!” It was Dr. Chapman, one of Carrington’s associates, approaching my car door. I figured that his smile and extended hand were good omens. I got out of the car and took the tall scientist’s huge hand. “Dr. Chapman! I’m surprised to see you here!” Dr. Chapman *had* testified at the court martial – and he had supported Hendry’s actions down the line. I’d imagined a great scientist like Carrington would have no truck with someone who had come down foursquare in opposition to his attitude towards his greatest discovery.

“It’s good to see you again, Mr. Scott,” Chapman said. “I’ll take you to Dr. Carrington. But first –” He slid a thick white card into the breast pocket of my jacket. “Radiation detector,” he said. “It will turn blue when exposed to



radiation. If the card turns dark blue, you’ve been exposed to a dangerous level of roentgens. Shouldn’t be a

problem. Follow me.”

I admit to a moment’s thrill – if you can call it that – at the thought of being exposed to atomic radiation. But I also felt a touch of comfort with the miniscule weight of the card against my chest. We hadn’t known the radioactive danger we were facing when our press plane touched down at Hiroshima, but we knew now, and it was reassuring that the government was taking precautions. I followed Chapman, but not into the round edifice of the Cyclotron; he walked me to a nondescript building behind.

Before we went inside, I stopped Chapman. “Doctor,” I said, “I’d like to ask ... Your testimony in the court-martial was almost entirely in Captain Hendry’s favor. You stated that his actions in destroying the invader were completely justified.”

“Well, so did you, Mr. Scott –”

“But I’m just a news grubber with ink on my fingers. You have doctorates from Oxford and the Sorbonne.” He smiled shyly. “Your statement, more than any other, was instrumental in securing acquittals for all of the airmen. I can’t imagine that made Dr. Carrington very happy.”

Chapman’s expression grew heavy. “My relationship with Dr. Carrington goes back to Bikini, Mr. Scott. Whatever his flaws, Arthur is not a vengeful or petty man. He recognizes ... but we’ll let him talk to you.” He led me inside.

The laboratory we entered was a marvel of blinking and chattering machines, attended by earnest white-coated men – and women, I was surprised to see. Among them were other acquaintances from the nightmare in the north: deep-voiced Dr. Vorhees and fidgety Dr. Stern. I didn’t see Dr. Redding, whose expertise with electricity had been the key which had saved all of us from the super-carrot from Mars. Maybe Carrington’s generosity of spirit didn’t extend that far. Like Chapman, the scientists greeted me warmly, but briefly; Chapman quickly escorted me to the inner sanctum.

My impressions of Carrington’s office: a messy desk before a large blackboard cluttered with numbers and incomprehensible Greek symbols. The man himself, short, bald, bearded, intense, sat on a tall stool before it, turning a piece of chalk about in his fingers like a miniature baton. He too wore a white coat, and again I was struck by his personal neatness, which stood out against the sloppiness of the room. He stared at the board as if enraptured, unconscious of our entrance.

“Arthur,” Chapman murmured. “Mr. Scott ...”

“Yes; Mr. Scott,” Carrington all but whispered, not turning around. “Hello, sir. Please have a seat.” He kept studying the blackboard, tapping the chalk against a particularly complicated equation. “I ... Well,” he finally said, dropping the chalk into the tray. He turned to us and almost smiled. “A problem in celestial mechanics,” he said, indicating the blackboard, “shared with me by Dr. Barnhardt in Washington.

I'm afraid that neither of us is making much headway. How are you, Mr. Scott?"

"Fine, sir. I –"

"I understand that congratulations are in order. The Pulitzer Prize, I believe."

"Yes sir," I acknowledged. "Thank you." His mention of the award was a bit awkward, and I imagined that his congratulations came with difficulty. I'd won it for my coverage of the alien at the North Pole. Who could like having someone receive a profession's highest honor for reporting his humiliation?

"I found your article ... quite fair," Carrington said, reading my mind. "Though it was a bit – don't misunderstand me – histrionic. 'Keep watching the skies' indeed!" He glanced at Dr. Chapman. "Thank you, Anton."

At that dismissal, Dr. Chapman left, closing the door to Carrington's office.

"Doctor," I said, "I know that you feel that Captain Hendry and the other airmen acted precipitously in destroying the ... umm ... invader –"

Carrington interrupted me with a bitter chuckle. "What did they call him? 'The Thing'?"

"– and that its death, or his death, was a great and unnecessary loss to science. Yet you declined to testify at Captain Hendry's court-martial. He and the others were completely exonerated. Why didn't you testify, Doctor?"

Carrington chuckled again. For him, it was a cheery mood. "I can see why you have excelled in your profession, Mr. Scott. You do arrive at the salient issue *sans* delay. I will certainly answer your question. I did not testify for a number of reasons. First, I didn't feel it necessary. The damage had been done. It would serve no purpose to punish Captain Hendry, who, though headstrong, is obviously a capable and courageous man. And," he smiled ruefully, "he managed to steal from me a most capable assistant. I have to respect that."

Hendry and Nikki were due to be married in a few weeks. I decided not to ask Dr. Carrington if he'd been invited.

"What I do not and cannot respect," Carrington continued, his mood darkening a

shade, "is that Captain Hendry and the others acted out of fear. Out of the belief that our visitor was hostile. He was –"

"Can you deny that, sir? Two of your colleagues –"

Carrington's countenance darkened further. "Yes, two of my colleagues – friends as well as colleagues, Mr. Scott – perished at his hands. I mourned them then and I mourn them now. But I ask you now as I asked you then, is it not probable that our visitor – the 'super carrot' as you dubbed him – acted out of the simple need for self-preservation?"

"I –"

"His kind, being vegetative, evolved free of the sexual competitiveness which has marked our animal species for millennia, and instilled in us a need for violence. His seeming hostility was nothing more than a biological imperative. I saw you pick a strawberry from our greenhouse garden, Mr. Scott," he grinned. "His actions against Diefenbach and Hayes arose from the same instinct. He was neither aggressive nor psychopathic. He was hungry, needful, and acted according to the dictates of his species."

"But he killed –!"

"Yes, and of course that cannot be permitted. But science, learning, has always had such costs. We *learn*, Mr. Scott. That is *our* species' biological imperative."

"So your belief is that the Thi- ... the visitor should have been incapacitated and captured instead of fried like so much rutabaga?"

"Of course," Carrington nodded. "Killing him answered nothing. It simply satisfied our group hysteria." He turned aside on his stool and contemplated his office wall. I said nothing. I like to think that a good interviewer knows how to use such silences – they often express as much as words.

"Mr. Scott," he said, his tone quiet, "do you realize the treasure we let slip through our hands? A creature capable of interplanetary – perhaps interstellar! – flight ... obviously our intellectual superior. Why was I unable to reach him? Have you wondered about that? I've thought of little else."

He swiveled to face me again. “Could it be, Mr. Scott, that our visitor had been injured, his mind damaged in the crash of his ‘saucer’? When he struck me in the corridor I suffered a concussion –“

“And a broken collarbone,” I interjected.

“— and couldn’t think clearly for a day and a night. Could it be that he too was so affected?”

“He turned off our heat and backed us into a corner,” I said, “that sounds like pretty straight thinking to me!”

“Or perhaps – and this is quite a thought – *what if he wasn’t the sole occupant of that spacecraft?* What if he weren’t the master of that vehicle? What if he was merely a worker drone – or even a mascot of some sort? A pet? Isn’t *that* a possibility?”

“Doctor, I suppose anything is poss- ”

“Yes!” Carrington exclaimed, slapping his desk. “Effectively, we know nothing about the visitor and his kind. And we *can’t* know, because Hendry and his minions blew up the spacecraft, murdered the visitor, and destroyed his progeny – they made the truth *impossible* to discover. That was the crime, Mr. Scott! *That* was the betrayal of science!” Carrington seemed to make a conscious effort to calm down. After a couple of breaths, he went on. “But of course, Captain Hendry couldn’t understand my point of view. Just as the visitor’s species and ours couldn’t understand each other. Isn’t that the way of things? Tragedy of a species-wide magnitude occurs ... because thinking, intelligent beings simply cannot communicate effectively.”

I didn’t know what to say to that. I didn’t want to score a cheap point by mentioning that Carrington himself had approved the use of thermite in trying to free the crashed saucer from the ice. But I tried. “Yes, they destroyed all traces of the Thing ... the visitor. Including stuff that was no immediate danger to our party. They were actually criticized for that by the prosecutor in the court martial. Not having a specimen to study might make it more difficult to fight the next time a saucer shows up.”

Carrington smiled and nodded. His eyes fixed on my face. I thought I’d impressed him. “You’re absolutely right. Mr. Scott. The military could have used ... a specimen. I’m glad *we* can communicate. I hope we can *continue* to.”

He fell silent again. His eyes never left mine – it was rather disconcerting.

“I asked you here, Mr. Scott, not simply to exorcise ill feelings towards the Air Force. As I say, that would be a supreme waste of my time and yours. I asked you here to reveal the real reason I didn’t testify against Captain Hendry and his crewmates. To reveal to a man who would understand it as the sequel to the events from the Arctic. And to ask you for an enormous favor.”

Carrington rose from behind his desk, brushing his hands free of residual chalk dust. “Come this way, please.”

Carrington led the way out of a second door, down a long corridor to a closed, heavy metal door. Carrington thumbed a button on an intercom box. The box squawked with a feminine voice. “Yes?”

“Our guest has arrived,” said Carrington.

The metal door emitted a loud click.

Carrington grasped the door handle and pulled it, with some effort, towards us. A staircase just inside rose to another level. Carrington stepped inside, and after I followed, took care to close the door and make sure that it latched. That done, he trotted up the stairs, and I followed.

The room was wide, painted white, illuminated with bright fluorescent bulbs that glared down upon a number of tables. White-coated technicians wandered among them. It took me a moment to recognize where I was. “A greenhouse,” I said.

“Yes, Mr. Scott,” said Carrington. “A greenhouse.”

Tentatively, I stepped up to one of the tables. A series of rubber tubes led from an overhead stanchion to the soil beneath, which thrived with plants I found very familiar. My breath suddenly had a tough time coming.

“Dr. Carrington,” I gasped. “I don’t think you’re growing strawberries these days.”

"No, Mr. Scott. No strawberries." He smiled. "They're out of season."

Growing before me were small white chrysales, similar to butterfly cocoons – but larger, thicker, stronger.

"You see," Carrington said, "that the plants closer to the food source are healthier than those further away. I noticed that first in the Arctic."

Dizzy, I looked up at the "food source," suspended on a beam above the table. "Is – that isn't human blood, is it?"

"No, Mr. Scott," Carrington laughed. "Beef blood, legally obtained from a slaughterhouse. You seem a little pale. Would you like to sit down? Marilyn!" He called to a young technician. "A glass of water for Mr. Scott, please."

I found myself on a folding chair by the wall. The room was dancing a whirling dervish. The young tech brought me a glass of water, which I quickly downed, and the room began to settle. "My God," I said to Carrington, standing before me. "You're growing more alien babies. I thought the Air Force burned everything."

"Everything they knew about, Mr. Scott," Carrington said. "They burned the visitor, they burned his severed arm, and they destroyed the infants I was nurturing in my laboratory, grown from seeds I found in the palm of the visitor's hand. But *they didn't find all of the seeds*. I had some hidden. I brought some back." He turned and indicated the greenhouse room. "And here they are."

I gasped, "Does – does the government know about this?"

"Oh, yes! At least, they know that I'm continuing my research. If you can't beat the military, join the military, Mr. Scott. I've convinced the Department of Defense that alien research is worthwhile – militarily." Carrington gestured to the wide room. "I'm given space for my experiments in a most secure facility. I'm given a stipend to employ assistants. Most vitally, I'm given *control*. That was hard to come by. The government believes in control above all. Control and secrecy."

"'Secrecy.' But – you've told me."

There was no chuckle to Carrington now. He practically glared. "Yes. Consider it a gesture of respect to the bloodhound instinct of the avid journalist, Mr. Scott. I know you, you see. I know that you will never let go of a story once you have it in your teeth.

"Thanks to your articles, Mr. Scott, the world already knows that we'd been 'visited.' Allowing you to release your ... 'scoop' was another recklessness on the part of Captain Hendry. Ever since, I've had the eyes of the media upon me without surcease." His tone became sarcastic. "Though you very kindly tried to number me among the visitor's enemies in your initial account, my true attitude could not long be disguised." Now his voice grew bitter. "I've been called everything from a mad scientist out of a Republic serial to a traitor against the human race!"

"I apologize for that, Doctor. I was just doing my –"

"This is why I've asked you here, Mr. Scott, and why the Pentagon allowed me to do so. Your misrepresentation of my research has exacerbated the fears of the public, added to its resentment of the noblest exertion of mankind – scientific inquiry – which you and your ilk have so ably stoked. We have labored fiercely, here, and regained the ground we've lost. We do not wish to have our efforts again ignorantly besmirched. So we want you to see what we're doing, first hand."

"'Biggest story since the parting of the Red Sea,'" I murmured, quoting myself. "Dr. Carrington ... tell me ... how ... how far along has your experiment progressed?"

Carrington nodded. "It was inevitable that you would ask that question. Are you stable enough to walk?"

I struggled to my feet. "I handled Bougainville and El Alamein," I said. "A good reporter can handle anything. Am I about to see what I think I am about to see?"

Carrington didn't answer, simply gestured towards the far end of the greenhouse, and another metal door. This one he unlocked himself with a

key chained to his waist. I've done few things in my life more terrifying than walking through that door.

The room beyond was not as large as the greenhouse but it was as brightly lit. A hospital bed sat in its center, the back cranked to an angle that allowed the occupant to sit erect. Arranged about the bed were various pieces of medical equipment – a scale, an X-ray machine, a table bearing the wire tendrils of an electroencephalograph helmet, mechanisms I did not recognize. Two white-clad techs looked up as we came in – but not the occupant of the bed.

"And me without my camera," I muttered.

Seated as it was, I couldn't gauge its exact height, but I could tell that it was huge. The skin bore a light green tinge of chlorophyll. Beneath a rigid line of what looked like bone, but undoubtedly wasn't, its eyes bored out of the westward-facing window, where the afternoon sun was beginning to show.

One hand of the creature opened and closed. I'd seen such a hand before, gnarled, its skin a thick vegetable rind, clawed, coming to life on a mess hall table. "Samuel," Carrington inquired of a tech, "how is everything today?"

"Fine, Doctor," the tech replied. "No change."

"It is difficult to bring the seedlings to adulthood," Carrington stated. "When severed from the parental vine, the vast majority shrivel, wilt and die. We can't ascertain why – some sort of Darwinian safeguard, possibly, restricting the population to those best suited for survival. This specimen is four months old – our most successful experiment to date."

My legs felt like sticks of soft licorice. I don't know how I was able to move, but I somehow managed to cross into the creature's line of sight. Its blank eyes turned to meet mine. The face was expressionless.

I moved out of the Thing's line of sight. It returned its stare to the window.

Barely able to breathe, I asked, "Is it always so ... still?"

"No agitation has been reported," Carrington said.

I continued to watch the Thing, staring placidly out of the window. "Can – can you communicate with it?"

"Not yet," Carrington said. "He follows physical cues to stand, lie down, move in a particular direction. But nothing verbal. He doesn't seem to have a hearing apparatus – ears. I doubt the species has spoken language. Which may account for my inability to plead successfully with his ... parent at the North Pole."

Carrington came up to me. He could see that I was still frightened, but his words, I could tell, came from the heart. "Do you know what will happen if you reveal our story, Mr. Scott? Even should you assure the world that there is no danger in what we do – only science conducted in good faith – politicians and profiteers will seize on this great scientific adventure, invade this laboratory, attack our funding, exercise their usual reprehensible qualities of panic and profit. Ruin our great opportunity as surely as Captain Hendry's electrical flytrap ruined our chances at the North Pole. And it is a great opportunity, Mr. Scott – greater even than I dreamed."

"Mr. Scott, we're trying to reach across an almost impossible gulf, accomplish an impossible task. This creature has had no access to the star-spanning technology lost in the Arctic ice. But as I say, we suspect the species relies on telepathic communication. In time, perhaps, if he survives, our specimen will communicate with his kind – and I don't mean his siblings and progeny from there." He indicated the greenhouse.

"Our EEGs show evidence that it is broadcasting thought waves of extraordinary power. We think it might be trying to reach other adults of its species – or even its home planet. Perhaps ... perhaps ... we can *use* him ... and *make contact with his civilization.* "



I felt a shudder run through my body – and I’m tall; the shudder took a while. “If it’s talking to its fellow carrots,” I asked, “what’s it telling them?”

Carrington shrugged. “Who can say? Probably nothing more significant than ‘Here I am.’”

“Or ...” I whispered to myself, “‘Come and get me.’”

Carrington crossed to the bed. He sat on its edge and rested his hand on the Thing’s claw. The gesture reminded me of a parent comforting his child. “And so this is why I have asked you here. You have a decision to make about what you tell the world. I ask you to forbear. In return for your present silence, I can promise you exclusive rights to our account when I feel the time is right. When that time will come, I cannot say.”

That got my back up. I may be 150 pounds of gristle and bone, but some of those bones make up a spine, and I’ve never liked being threatened. “Doctor – what happens if I say no? Do you tell our boyfriend here to tear me apart? Will he hang me upside down over one of those tables? I warn you, my blood is 90 proof! Bad for babies!”

Carrington’s eyes never left the Thing, but his brows came together and his smile was pained. “Mr. Scott! Please!” I felt immediate shame. There are some things even a Nobel Prize winner wouldn’t do.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I know better than that. But Doctor, you’re asking me to leave my profession in the dust. Agreeing to silence – even for the good of your project, even for the promise of future exclusive rights – goes against twenty years of reporter grain. *People have the right to know.* And I’ve always bet that they won’t mess things up if they do know.”

“A ‘Thing,’” Dr. Carrington muttered. “Protected by a ‘traitor to the human race.’” He kept studying the creature’s face. “You show commendable faith in mankind, Mr. Scott. I have faith, too. A faith that when we confront and

explore what is unknown, we can make it ours. Can you not understand?”

It was as close to plaintiveness as a man like him could get – and it worked. I felt sorry for him. He had lost so much of what meant the most to him, and now he felt he had it back. Whether he kept it was up to me.

“I’ll have to think about it, Doctor,” I said. “I’ll give you my answer tomorrow. In the meantime ... I promise I’ll keep my visit here absolutely secret – at least until then. Will that satisfy you?”

“It will have to.” Carrington bestirred himself and stood. He seemed suddenly winded, exhausted, small. “I’ll walk you out.”

Downstairs, in his office, as he returned to his seat before the impossible problem, Dr. Carrington said, “Mr. Scott, I understand your perspective. I believe you understand mine. I have faith –” That word again! “– that you will decide ... correctly.”

He picked up the chalk and was lost once more in his mathematics.

With shaking hands I returned my radiation tag to Dr. Chapman. The card bore only the slightest tinge of blue. I drove away. At the gate, I paused to look again at the tremendous view below.

I thought of those unknowable mental messages the Thing behind me had broadcast into the cosmos, to his unknown progenitors, to his home planet, to his native race. And the way he had stared out of his window – perhaps at the sunset, but perhaps at Berkeley, and San Francisco across the Bay, waiting there like a feast set out for a wedding. Would his broadcasts be heard? What would the answer be? Would they come? If they did, would they listen this time to men like Dr. Carrington, or would men like Captain Hendry have to meet them with puny human weapons and courageous human hearts to once more save our benighted race?

Keep watching the skies.





THE CHALLENGER TRIBUTE

MARY AXFORD

Science fiction fandom brings you into contact with many fine and gentle souls. Among those I have been lucky enough to know was **Mary Axford**. Southern fan and con-giver, Georgia Tech librarian for 26 years, mentor to students of research and passionate advocate for equality, a kind and beautiful, caring and compassionate lady who left us without warning in late January. May God speed and protect her across that Rainbow Bridge.

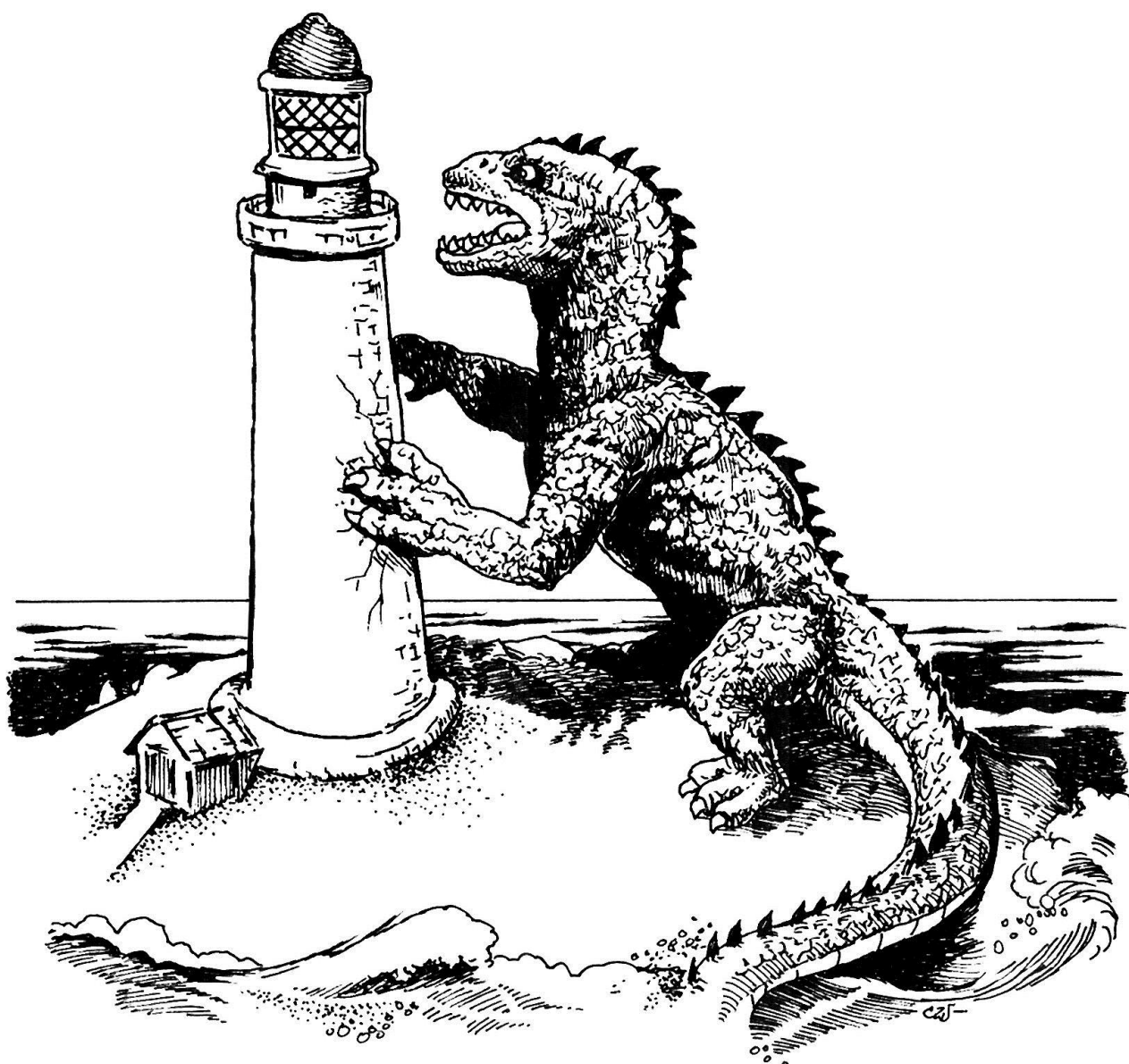


ATTACK OF THE AMAZING COLOSSAL MONSTERS: CREATURE FEATURES OF THE 1950S

Jim Ivers

It's the same old world / But nothing is the same.

– Tom Waits



Illo by CHARLIE WILLIAMS

Submitted for your approval, a look back at the giant insect (plus reptile, crustacean, etc.) craze that crawled and stomped its way into theaters and drive-ins in the 1950s. Horror films experienced a severe period of decline from 1946 to 1954. After 1945's *House of Dracula*, the services of the classic monsters of the past were no longer needed. Occasionally one or more would be hauled out of moth balls to chase Abbott & Costello around in a horror-comedy then put back into storage.

Science, which seems to be ever advancing beyond our comprehension and control, would give fictional horror a run for its money. Big Science ended World War II with a bang, but left behind a legacy of fear for the future. The terrifying nuclear genie was out of the bottle. There was mounting concern about atomic bomb testing (in Nevada and elsewhere) and the long-term effects of radioactive fallout. Newsreels of Japanese cities vaporized into dust and scarred survivors covered in horrible radiation burns were far more frightening than vampires, werewolves, and a musty, shambling mummy. Gothic and supernatural horror films were replaced by "serious" science fiction and technology-based terror. The indirect result of nuclear tests (awakening prehistoric behemoths entombed in the earth) and the direct effects of radiation on living creatures became the basis for a hot new monster craze that blurred the line between science fiction and horror.

Almost overnight, the film industry went "atomic." Last-minute title changes and re-issues worked in "atom" or "atomic" in the hope of boosting a film's box-office draw. (It mattered little if the story had anything to do with nuclear science.) There was *Creature with the Atom Brain*, *The Atomic Man* (formerly *Timeslip*), *Atom Age Vampire*, *The Atomic Brain* (formerly *Monstrosity*), *The Atomic Kid* (a Mickey Rooney comedy about radiation!), *Atomic Women*, *Atom Man* vs. *Superman*, *Atomic Submarine* (sub vs. UFO sci-fi adventure), et al. The bite of a radioactive wolf is central to 1956's *Werewolf* (I'm surprised they didn't rename it *Atomic Werewolf*). And Lon Chaney's electrically-charged, pre-

nuclear *Man Made Monster* (1941) was re-issued as *Atomic Monster*. Espionage yarns (*The Atomic City*, et al.) used kidnapped nuclear scientists and stolen atomic secrets as a plot device. The key element in *Kiss Me Deadly* (adapted from a Mike Hammer detective novel) was changed from a suitcase of heroin to a lead box containing deadly plutonium. The memorable finale features the spectacular, fiery meltdown of a beach house after the box is opened. (In a rare case of bucking the trend, Ed Wood's *Bride of the Atom* was changed by the producers to the generic *Bride of the Monster*, much to Wood's dismay.) Meanwhile, Japan created nuclear mutant films, *The H-Man* (1958), *The Human Vapor* (1960), et al.

Invasion of the Teenagers

Stories about atomic radiation led to a series of bizarre "Giantsploitation" novelty films. By the mid-50s parents were starting to stay home to watch television while a generation of highly mobile teenagers were out looking for light entertainment. The scary giant-bug movie was the perfect hook to reel in this new demographic. Drive-in theaters popped up in record numbers across America as the monster-packed double bill became a weekend ritual for millions of teenagers.

The heroes of these tall tales were mostly mature (and rather square) military men and brainy (but handsome) scientists. However, the stories gradually evolved to reflect the audience. By 1957 teenage characters started to turn up in minor roles. Young couples parked on Lover's Lane were often among the first victims of the titular monsters. (This became a standard trope in the second wave of youth-oriented horror-slasher films in the late '70s.) Some screenplays, such as *The Monster That Challenged the World*, reveal a disapproving attitude towards this new breed of brash, independent youngsters. In *The Giant Claw*, a group of obnoxious teens recklessly tearing around in a hot rod pay the ultimate price for their bad behavior. (The film all but screams: "Take that, you young punks!") Eventually, more sympathetic, even heroic, teenagers (played by much older actors) began to appear. AIP's youth-pandering *Earth vs. the Spider* (1958) is a prime example, as we shall see. By the time we get to

The Cape Canaveral Monsters (1960), the protagonists are all spunky, know-it-all college kids.

The Parameters of this Study

Keeping all these uppity atomic bugs and overgrown critters in line is a daunting task. This study will focus on films based on science-related mishaps resulting in big-ass monsters trashing our urban centers. Stories featuring miniaturized people confronting giant-by-default creatures will also be included. However, we must pass over (albeit, with a few exceptions) the giant beasts of mythology, fantasy, and folklore, as well as naturally-grown giant apes, sea monsters, dinosaurs, and dinosaur-like aliens (I'm talking about you, *20 Million Miles to Earth*). The first Godzilla film deserves mention for specific reasons, but not its vast line of sequels and spin-offs which comprise a subgenre all its own.

The film cycle concerning humans transformed by radiation into towering giants is another separate subgenre. Director-producer Bert I. Gordon (the notorious B.I.G.) made most of these films which are distinguished by their cheapness and indifferent direction. Not surprisingly, much of Gordon's oeuvre has been mocked on *Mystery Science Theater 3000*. His giant human films are *The Cyclops* (which includes some giant iguanas), *The Amazing Colossal Man*, followed by the sequel *War of the Colossal Beast* (1957-58), and *Village of the Giants* (1965), a silly youth-oriented romp that includes a giant duck. Gordon's big-bug features include: *Beginning of the End* (1957), *Earth vs. the Spider* (1958), *The Food of the Gods* (1976), and *Empire of the Ants* (1977).

A campy cult favorite in the giant subgenre is Nathan Juran's *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (1958). This was copied in *The 30 Foot Bride of Candy Rock* (1959), Lou Costello's final film. Later remakes include *Attack of the 50 Ft. Woman* (HBO, 1993) starring Daryl Hannah, the exploitative R-rated *Attack of the 60 Foot Centerfold* (1995) by schlockmeister Fred Olen Ray [starring the future female wrestling phenomenon, J.J. North – editor], and the fairly recent *Attack of the 50 Ft. Cheerleader* (2012).

Early Influences

H.G. Wells (1866-1946), the prolific visionary who put the science in science fiction, is the unofficial father of this concept. The giant insects in his *The Food of the Gods* (1904) anticipated a film cycle that would not appear until several years after his death. Strangely enough, his novel was not directly adapted to film until 1976.



Dr. Cyclops (Paramount, 1940) - Filmed in vivid Technicolor, Albert Dekker plays a classic mad scientist who uses glowing green radium to shrink a group of visiting scientists down to doll-size captives. After escaping, the little people encounter a giant cat, comical chickens, and a nasty alligator. Presented as an adventure fantasy instead of a frightening horror film, this was a triumph in special effects that was vastly superior to the similar *The Devil-Doll* (1936).

Giant prop spiders appear in *The Thief of Bagdad* (1940), *Tarzan's Desert Treasure* (1943) and the goofy *Mesa of Lost Women* (1953). The same (or

similar) silly leaping “cave spider” puppet from *Cat-Women of the Moon* (1953) returns in *World Without End* (1956), *Queen of Outer Space* (1958), *Missile to the Moon* (1959), and *Valley of the Dragons* (1961).

Abbott and Costello Go to Mars (Universal, 1953)

- This early Space Age comedy includes a strangely abrupt sequence, with no context or logic, involving a giant dog on the planet Venus. The house-sized canine suddenly appears and chases Costello into a cave. We never see it again. The dog is merely a device tossed in to get Lou into the cave where the rest of the story unfolds. Still, this deserves mention for using a special effect process that would become a crucial element in many sci-fi/horror films to come.

Films of the 1950s

Once filmmakers realized that a new, highly-lucrative novelty had emerged (albeit one based on a simplistic gimmick), a basic formula quickly fell into place. The same ingredients and plot structure turns up in film after film. Many use a pseudo-documentary format that sets up the scene quickly and efficiently with narration over low-cost stock footage (usually newsreels of atomic tests). Then a series of bizarre and horrific killings occur in some generic “Anywhere USA” town. At



first we don't see the monster, just the terrified faces of its victims. Police are stumped and call in a specialist to examine some peculiar organic matter or slimy goo left at the scene. Enter Handsome Scientist who either brings along the love interest, Pretty Lab Assistant, or finds one in town. Sometimes the love interest is a plucky, headstrong female reporter/photographer.

More mysterious deaths occur every 12 minutes or so, and we finally get a good look at the giant monster. After way too much exposition, lectures (frequently aided by science class film strips), and a boring romantic subplot, the scientist finally

discovers some clever scientific method for killing the monster. Or, lacking a budget or creative ideas, they just blow the damn thing to hell with dynamite. Other ingredients include a damsel-in-distress rescue, a skeptical, hard-ass general or police chief who initially dismisses the scientist as a crackpot, and a rival suitor who makes a play for Pretty Lab Assistant/Reporter (and later dies).

Beast from 20,000 Fathoms (Warner Bros., 1953)

- This highly influential film began the creature-on-a-rampage trend. Based on a Ray Bradbury story, it was made by Jack Dietz Productions. One of the screenwriters, Fred Freiberger, is best known for producing the third and final season of *Star Trek* (1968-1969). The documentary style introduction shows an atomic bomb test over the Arctic Circle. This lets loose a hibernating dinosaur, the fictional Rhedosaurus, which proceeds to wreak havoc. It is amusing to see Kenneth Tobey playing essentially the same character from *The Thing from Another World* (1951) at another ice-bound military base. The creature goes on a rampage in Manhattan and trashes Coney Island amusement park before being killed by a bullet containing radioactive isotopes. The great stop-motion special effects by the legendary Ray Harryhausen makes this a must-see. The film was a surprise hit. In 1957 Harryhausen animated the similar (and similar sounding) *20 Million Miles to Earth* about a dinosaur-like reptilian creature from Venus that trashes Rome.

Bradbury's short story “The Fog Horn” was about the last of a dying breed of sea creatures that rises from the ocean floor after hearing what it thinks is a mating call. It destroys a lighthouse after discovering the sound is merely a fog horn. The lighthouse scene is in the film. Also in 1953, the film version of Bradbury's *They Came from Beyond Space* was released. This was one of the first, and best, non-invading alien stories brought to the screen.

Godzilla (Japan, 1954) - It's no secret that Toho studios was directly inspired by *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*. This is essentially a remake with Tokyo substituting for New York. Much darker and more grim than the countless sequels and spin-offs that followed in its wake. About 20 minutes was cut from the Americanized 1956 U.S. release so new

footage with Raymond Burr (playing a reporter) could be added.

Killers from Space (1954) - Aliens living in a Nevada cavern harness the energy from nuclear bomb tests to grow an army of carnivorous creatures to unleash on the Earth. Giant reptiles, insects and spiders (all rear-screen projections) menace Peter Graves in one scene. The extremely cheap and cheesy production and goofy-looking aliens have turned this into a cult film.

Monster from the Ocean Floor (May, 1954) - Independent micro-budget B-movie by Roger Corman made shortly before he joined AIP. This Atomic-Age mutant is a one-eyed amoeba creature that resembles a large octopus. A typically cheap Corman knock-off inspired by *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*.

Them! (June, 1954) - The first, and best, giant bug film and one of the most highly-regarded science fiction films of the decade. Warner Brothers was so happy with the success of *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* it got Jack Dietz Productions to come back for a follow-up film. Radiation from nuclear tests in New Mexico produce a swarm of hideous giant ants that move into the drainage system beneath Los Angeles. There are no process-screen effects; the ants are all well-made constructions. Great finale in the dark, spooky tunnels with the Army torching the ugly critters with flamethrowers.

Best known for its lean-and-mean crime-dramas, Warners was the perfect studio for this type of thriller. Briskly paced with a film noir look and plenty of action, this is a remarkably well-made film. Every aspect of its production was handled with care and creativity. Most importantly, the script and the acting make the fantastic story seem plausible. These qualities are often lacking in the many cheap imitations that followed.

Tarantula (Universal-Int., 1955) - Universal's response to *Them!* is the second-best, and most disturbing, giant bug movie. Leo G. Carroll is a scientist who develops an experimental food nutrient using atomic isotopes. After producing some hog-sized hamsters, a spider gets into the food and grows into a menacing giant. John Agar is another scientist who arrives to save the day.

Process-screen effects of a live tarantula are convincing — and scary as hell.

Panther Girl of the Kongo (Republic, 1955) - This gets honorable mention. A mad scientist grows giant crayfish that cause mayhem in the African jungle. Fun Republic serial with a pretty good blend of actors and process-screen special effects. However, scenes involving a fabricated giant claw that grabs Panther Girl Phyllis Coates are pretty laughable. They couldn't afford to build an entire creature so the claw has to come out from behind a huge boulder.

King Dinosaur (1955) - This Bert I. Gordon sci-fi schlock-fest gets semi-honorable mention for an incredibly clumsy composite shot with a giant wasp. Astronauts exploring an Earth-like planet find mostly ordinary wildlife. But on a small island they are threatened by giant lizards, including "King Dinosaur" (a big iguana-saurus) idiotically described as resembling a tyrannosaurus rex. Luckily, they have a spare A-bomb and nuke the entire island. Problem solved.

Bride of the Monster (1955) - This Ed Wood masterwork gets honorable mention for the awesome spectacle of an aged Bela Lugosi wrestling with a giant "atomic" octopus (a rubber prop originally made for *Wake of the Red Witch*). Thank you, Ed, for blowing our minds once again. Wood took a cliché '40s mad doctor plot and jazzed it up with a contemporary atomic monster gimmick. Lugosi had been playing a variety of mad scientists since the thirties. The scene where he beats Lobo (Tor Johnson) with a whip was directly lifted from *The Corpse Vanishes* (Monogram, 1942). The deranged and lecherous henchman in *Corpse* was the basis for Lobo. Even the fake stone wall backdrop in the *Corpse* laboratory was recreated (or recycled) in the Wood film.

Speaking of oversized octopi, honorable mention goes to the terrific giant octopus/squid battle in Disney's Jules Verne fantasy *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (1954). These two films perfectly represent the opposite ends of the budget/quality spectrum.

It Came from Beneath the Sea (July 1955) - Columbia Pictures weighs in with its own super-sized monster from the ocean. Hydrogen bomb

tests off the Marshall Islands force a gigantic radioactive octopus out of its natural deep water habitat. It ends up in San Francisco Bay for the big finale.

Framed by the usual tedious documentary format, narration and stock footage constantly intrude to needlessly explain every plot point. Once again, Kenneth Tobey plays a military leader (commanding a nuclear submarine) in charge of battling another rampaging beast. There's also an awkward, unconvincing romance with a headstrong "pretty female scientist" Faith Domergue. She has a male lab partner, but he's clearly not interested in her. (His stuffy bow ties telegraph that he's a bookish dullard.)

The first hour is talky and slowly paced, but the attack on the Golden Gate Bridge is iconic due to Ray Harryhausen's superb animation. Budget restraints only provided for six of the creature's eight arms to be seen. After a fight with the submarine, the octopus is blown up by a torpedo armed with a small nuclear warhead.

Columbia released this as a double feature with *Creature with the Atom Brain* (no creature, just reanimated corpses with not-so-atomic brains).



The Phantom from 10,000 Leagues (Dec. 1955) Incredibly cheap-looking *Creature from the Black Lagoon* ripoff trying to sound like *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*. Radiation creates mutant sea monster (a guy in a clumsy, ridiculous rubber Godzilla-ish suit). Good for a few laughs. (Note: no giant bug films came out in 1956.)

Attack of the Crab Monsters (Allied Artists, Feb., 1957) - Surprisingly effective Roger Corman horror-chiller. The disturbing premise of intelligent, brain-eating giant crabs was genuinely frightening when I saw this as a kid on *Creature Features*.

A group of scientists studying the effects of nuclear weapons tests are stranded on a tiny Pacific island. They learn that the earlier group of scientists have been eaten by mutated giant crabs that have absorbed the minds of their victims. What makes the crabs especially creepy is that they talk, by telegraphing their voices, taunting their victims. After conventional weapons fail, the scientists discover that electricity with a positive charge can kill the irradiated crustaceans.

Corman gets the most out of a tight budget and a no-name cast, which includes a pre-*Gilligan's Island* Russell Johnson. The crabs are no longer that scary looking but they are well-constructed props nonetheless.

The Deadly Mantis (May 1957) - Coming from Universal, this is a huge disappointment. It still stands head and pincers above many far worse films from 1957-59. After a strangely mutant-free 1956, the genre peaked in 1957 with no less than nine entries (two about colossal humans) hitting the theaters and drive-ins. Writer/producer William Alland (from *Tarantula* – and his acting days in such schlock as *Citizen Kane*) toured a science museum for inspiration and saw a praying mantis display. As usual, the script was broken down using a formula sheet based on *Them*!

Man's meddling with the Arctic environment, including atomic tests, dislodges a giant prehistoric praying mantis from the ice. It flies about making an annoying mosquito sound and attacks planes. Loads of Air Force stock footage and narration is used for padding. Air Force colonel Craig Stevens, paleontologist William Hopper and Alix Talton as the obligatory reporter/love interest struggle with a lifeless script. The mantis looks cool, but the effects, especially flying scenes, are poorly done. Too much talk and file footage instead of action. Even the finale is weak and unexciting. Nathan Juran is an experienced sci-fi director, but could not save this one from mediocrity.

The Beginning of the End (1957) - Bert I. Gordon cranks out a cheap, inferior imitation of *Them!* Opening scene of necking teenagers in a car being attacked panders to the drive-in crowd this film was made for. A young Peter Graves really paid his dues in numerous schlock sci-fi films in the '50s. Here Graves gets his freak on once again in a desperate fight against giant, rapacious grasshoppers. He plays a typical white-coat scientist who foolishly uses radioactive isotopes to create the prototype for Miracle-Gro. Making beach ball-size tomatoes is pretty cool, but there's one minor side effect — a plague of bus-sized, man-eating locusts. Great job, Pete. If this premise sounds familiar it's because it was stolen outright from *Tarantula*.

The slowly-paced talky story takes forever to get going. As the swarm approaches Chicago, the Army comes up with a sensible plan: evacuate the city and drop an atomic bomb. (Ah, the good old days when the military was always right.) Graves devises a beacon to lure the uppity insects into Lake Michigan where they all drown — seconds before the bomb is due to drop.

This film features two obvious stock characters: a nosy female reporter/love interest (Peggie Castle) and a no-nonsense General/Colonel character (Morris Ankrum) who is often at odds with the hero. Ankrum was typecast as military leaders in *Invaders from Mars*, *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, *The Giant Claw*, et al.

Stock newsreel footage shows the Army supposedly firing on the locusts. Unlike *Them!*, there are no actual-size constructions so all the killings occur, boringly, off camera. Composites showing people and live grasshoppers in the same shot are passable given the skimpy budget. However, some of the scenes of locusts crawling across a photograph of the Wrigley building are laughable. This has a so-bad-it's-good following.

The Black Scorpion (1957) - This classy production is a shining example of how this sort of film should be done. Lots of action with great stop-motion scorpions by Willis O'Brien (*King Kong*) elevates this independent film. Distributed (and probably co-produced) by Warner Bros.

Terrific cavern sequence with Richard Denning menaced by slimy scorpions, a giant worm with

tentacles, and even a freaking animated spider. Suspenseful moments and some disturbing scenes (scorpions attacking passengers from a derailed train, etc.). Mara Corday makes her third and final genre appearance playing a Mexican senorita. Lack of funds toward the end show in some sub-par unfinished effects. (A detailed review of this film has been written for a possible future issue.)

The Monster That Challenged the World (1957) - The script, with its striking but overly ambitious title, is by David Duncan, who also wrote *The Black Scorpion*. Both films involve especially nasty, ugly monsters who commit grisly killings in stories that adhere to the established *Them!* formula. This is also one of those fondly remembered films (along with *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* and *Earth vs. The Flying Saucers*) that once played on Saturday afternoon TV and scared the bejeebers out of me as a kid. An aquatic monstrosity which resembles a giant caterpillar emerges from a huge lake and leaves a string of grotesque, distorted corpses in its wake.

The usual documentary intro sets the scene at a Navy laboratory on the shore of the Salton Sea. Radiation in the water causes giant mollusks to grow in a cavern that breaks open during an earthquake. Sailors and civilians are being mysteriously killed. The only clues left behind are blobs of slimy goop.

One victim is a swinging (and presumably promiscuous) teenage girl out for kicks. She and her date ignore the adult authority figures and take a reckless late-night swim which ends in tragedy. (When will these darn kids ever learn?)

Western star Tim Holt is a naval officer investigating the murders. He immediately falls for pretty lab assistant/secretary Gail (Audrey Dalton). The story plods along with talky scenes of exposition. A few strategic jump-scares and a goofy comic relief character interrupt the tedium. A darkly lit sequence of a canal watchman getting suddenly grabbed by one of the monsters is still jolting. The routine, by-the-numbers story is redeemed by a well-staged finale. Back at the lab, a rampaging monster traps Gail and her young daughter in a supply closet and tears apart the door with its awful pincers. The design and articulation of this massive 15-foot-long creature

is impressive as well as nightmarishly disturbing. However, the script does not provide an imaginative, scientific solution for killing off the creatures. Conventional methods such as dynamite and M1 rifles get the job done.

The Giant Claw (Columbia, 1957) - Talk about your angry birds — this has the dubious honor of being the most mocked entry in the genre. A giant, ugly, long-necked vulture from another galaxy wreaks havoc. It not only attacks planes but also eats the poor aviators after they bail out. The special effects were unwisely farmed out to a Mexican company that bungled the job beyond belief. They delivered a comical rubbery marionette that resembles a turkey buzzard. It was



too late and too costly to replace so producer Sam Katzman completed and released the film as a straight-faced joke. It turned out to be the funniest film of the year.

One amusing scene panders, albeit disapprovingly, to the youth market. Jeff Morrow and Mara Corday are nearly run off the road by obnoxious teenagers in a hot rod. (Damn these disrespectful youngsters with their rock 'n' roll music and hep slang insults.) Fortunately, the Giant Claw swoops down and teaches the bratty youths a valuable lesson in etiquette.

During the climax, Big Bird wrecks the Empire State building. Director Fred F. Sears also made *Earth vs the Flying Saucers*; a clip from that film (the Washington monument crashing to the ground) was edited in. The top brass army generals are played by the ubiquitous Morris

Ankrum and Robert Shayne (Inspector Henderson from *The Adventures of Superman* TV series).

Monster from Green Hell (May, 1957) - This blatant clone of *Them!* gets no points for originality. An experimental rocket (stock footage of a Nazi V1 launch) with animals and insects onboard is shot into space and exposed to a radiation belt before crashing in Africa. A scientific expedition through the jungle encounters giant mutated wasps (that menace stock footage animals). Although these hideous creatures look nothing like wasps, the huge actual-size props are simultaneously cool and hilarious. Silly fun with a ridiculous volcano eruption finale.

The Incredible Shrinking Man (Universal, 1957) - A beautifully made classic adapted from the Richard Matheson novel that transcends the genre. While boating a man is enveloped in a strange radiation cloud. This, combined with an accidental exposure to a large amount of common insecticide four months later sets off a chain-reaction that alters his molecular structure, causing his cells to shrink. He keeps getting smaller with no end in sight. At six inches tall he's menaced by a nasty cat, but the unforgettable highlight is the climactic battle with a terrifying tarantula. The ending includes a brilliant existential voiceover about his place in the universe that must have sailed over the heads of the teenagers who saw this at the drive-in. [Editor's note: This film was the first movie to win a Hugo Award.]

Attack of the Puppet People (AIP, 1958) - This Bert I. Gordon ripoff of *The Incredible Shrinking Man* lifts its plot directly from *Dr. Cyclops*. Miniaturized people, including two hip teenagers, are briefly menaced by a giant dog. Cheaply made with crude special effects that are no better than 1936's *The Devil Doll*. (For more details, see "The Films of John Agar, Part 1" in *The Kobb Log* 9.)

Earth vs. the Spider (AIP, 1958) - Produced, directed, and partly written by Bert I. Gordon, this shameless retread of *Tarantula* is surprisingly hair-raising and well-made within the confines of its small budget. This features better-than-expected special effects. The composite shots of a live giant spider are smoothly incorporated. Considering that Gordon made the laughable *The Beginning of the End* the previous year, the vastly

improved quality is striking. Presumably, hiring a no-name cast transferred more funds into the special effects budget where it would do the most good. Films in this genre rely almost entirely on the quality of their monster effects.

By this time AIP was busy cranking out teen-oriented horror and juvenile delinquent pictures with titles like *I Was a Teenage Werewolf* and *High School Hellcat*. AIP crafted their product using a standardized formula. This film includes all the classic ingredients. We have misunderstood teenage protagonists (initially dismissed by their skeptical elders), a generically pleasant small town setting, a sporty hot rod convertible, rock music (plus gratuitous dancing), a few gruesome killings (wrinkled corpses sucked dry by the spider), and a scary monster that is terminated in an imaginative way.

This opens with a relatively hip, youngish science teacher demonstrating an electric arc (Dramatic Foreshadowing 101). The two leads are absurdly clean-cut high school students, Carol and Mark. As chance would have it, Mark works at a theater where *Attack of the Puppet People* and *The Amazing Colossal Man* just happen to be playing in a double bill. What are the odds? The kids discover a gigantic killer tarantula living in a cavern, but the dumb, cynical adults — including a cranky, belligerent sheriff — don't believe them at first. The dim-witted cop even scoffs at the “egg-head” science teacher. A tanker truck with cancer-causing DDT pesticide sprays the oversized arachnid. Thought to be dead, the spider is put in temporary storage in the school gymnasium. What could possibly go wrong now?

Interesting to note this script doesn't bother to explain or even suggest how the creature mutated into a giant. The science teacher (who puts on a cool leather jacket and becomes the hero of the story) only mentions the need for further scientific study. Perhaps Gordon thought tossing in a nuclear or environmental cause would clutter up the story. And it is deeply ironic that a god-awful poison like DDT (banned in 1972) is seen as the helpful, albeit temporary, solution. (Thanks again, Big Science.)

A rock'n'roll band practices in the gym while some kids dance. The loud music wakes up the

sleeping spider and all hell breaks loose. Things get personal when it attacks the science teacher's house — including a classic monster-outside-the-window scene — while his wife and baby are home. In the end, the creature returns to its cave (supposedly Carlsbad Caverns was used) where a giant electric arc is rigged up by the science teacher to fry the eight-legged troublemaker.

The Strange World of Planet X aka *The Cosmic Monster* (UK, 1958) - Europe's only half-hearted stab at the genre comes from England. Dull, talky story about tampering with the Earth's magnetic forces which results in the creation of a giant spider and a grasshopper. These creatures, which don't do anything, are only seen briefly. An out of place Forrest Tucker stars to make the film more commercial in the U.S. The giant bugs may have been added as an afterthought for the same reason.

The Fly (1958) - Teleportation experiment gone horribly awry creates

monstrous half-man half-fly hybrid. Not a traditional giant bug movie but a thoughtful, carefully-paced horror shocker. The memorable finale with a human-headed fly trapped in a spiderweb is incredibly haunting and disturbed me and other kids who saw it on TV in the '60s and '70s. Followed by two sequels.



The Blob (1958) - Honorable mention goes to this inventive made-on-a-shoestring indie for creating a giant, menacing monster that followed the trend without resorting to the same old irradiated mutant plot. A gelatinous alien amoeba from a meteorite dissolves people as it rapidly grows into a house-sized mass of lethal goo. The teen-oriented “Rebel with a Blob” story with a young Steve McQueen (the next best thing to James Dean) made this a rock-solid youth-market hit.

Not surprisingly, the film was initiated by the owner of a drive-in chain who wanted to get it on the giant-creature craze.

Teenagers from Outer Space (June 1959) - This home movie made in 1956 for \$14,000 was originally called *The Boy from Out of this World*. Warners bought it and released it three years later. Featuring the cheapest special effect ever, the shadow of a giant alien lobster terrorizes a small town. We never see the actual crustacean, suggesting they must have used a plastic toy. Priceless unintentional comedy celebrated by *Mystery Science Theater 3000*.



Have Rocket -- Will Travel (August 1959) - This gets a shout out for a well-executed giant spider scene. The Three Stooges must have had terrible management. It took 25 years of plugging away making hilarious one-reelers before they got to make this, their first feature film. And even then it was due to their renewed popularity on television. On another planet they're chased by a giant

tarantula that shoots fire like a flame thrower. The process screen work is especially realistic, making the alien arachnid more frightening than funny.

The Giant Behemoth (UK, 1959) - Britain's contribution to the genre, co-produced with Allied Artists, began development with a shapeless radiation blob monster. The script was rewritten to closely copy *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms* with a huge marine dinosaur that attacks London. Willis O'Brien was hired to do the stop-motion animation, but only did minimal work on the film.

This is the first giant monster story to speak out — via an opening science lecture — against the dangers of nuclear testing in the world's oceans. Radioactive fallout damages the ocean's ecosystem and resurrects a hibernating paleosaurus. The creature radiates deadly energy much like an electric eel, causing people to be burned to death (recalling horrific images of Hiroshima). The dinosaur is also slowing dying from the radiation that revived it — but not soon enough for frightened Londoners. Blowing the thing to pieces would simply spread the radiation over a wider area so, it is killed with a radium-filled torpedo. This repeats the method used earlier in *It Came from Beneath the Sea* and *Beast from 20,000 Fathoms*.

At the end we learn that fish killed by the residual radiation is washing up as far away as the U.S., giving this otherwise derivative monster romp an atypical touch of social commentary.

Two years later a British-Irish production made *Gorgo* (1961), another London-trashed-by-aquatic-dinosaur story that is obviously trying to be a U.K. version of *Godzilla*.

The Giant Gila Monster (1959) - If you ever wanted to see a short (74 min.) film that feels like it goes on forever, this is it. A dreadful snooze-fest, even the joke-filled *Mystery Science Theater* version is unbearable to sit through. There's only about 5 minutes of footage of a live gila monster crawling across a set with miniature props. The rest of the film is padded with endless scenes of dopey, hot-rodding teenagers, a no-nonsense cop, and a hayseed town drunk tossed in for comic relief. To kill some screen time, and add more youth appeal, there's a sock-hop dance sequence with two dull pop songs. It's an extended remake

of the similar gymnasium band practice scene from the much better *Earth vs. the Spider*. The gila monster does not care for this type of music and busts through the wall of the building (a cheap model) where the dance is being held.

Here the creature's giant size is attributed to some kind of glandular anomaly. By this time the standard nuclear radiation premise was getting tired and less relevant (to teens, anyway). So long as the movie has a big, scary monster-animal, who cares how it got that way? This is the epitome of cheap, boring, unimaginative filmmaking designed to cash in on a fad. A total waste of time with no redeeming factors and the low point of a trendy subgenre that was coming to an end.

The Killer Shrews (1959) - Shot back-to-back with *Gila Monster* for release as a double bill, this is at least a slightly better film (it could not possibly have been worse). For starters, the absence of annoying teenagers and comic relief characters is a big plus. At a secret research lab on a mysterious island, genetic experiments go horribly wrong. Hundreds of nasty giant mutated shrews (scrappy dogs rigged up in shaggy fur costumes) roam around the island in packs. Talky melodrama is helped by a claustrophobic setting and some tense moments. In the grand tradition of vintage cinema, the two ethnic characters in the cast (a black guy and a Mexican) are the first to be killed off by the dogs — I mean shrews. In the ridiculous finale, the survivors escape by crawling to the boat dock inside a cluster of roped-together oil drums. If you must see it, at least watch the *Mystery Science Theater* version which at least provides some funny moments.

Attack of the Giant Leeches (Oct. 1959) - We close out the decade with an AIP film from Gene Corman (Roger's brother) that, although mocked by *MST3K*, has a few noteworthy elements. Set in a swampy, backwater township in Florida, it's inferred that atomic sludge from nearby Cape Canaveral is probably responsible for the growth of the titular giant leeches. As usual, this is simply accepted in a matter-of-fact way and glossed over without further comment. No harm, no foul.

All we see of this remote, one-alligator town is the general store where stereotypical yokels hang out to get liquored up and ogle the chubby owner's

absurdly hot wife, Liz (Yvette Vickers). These cartoonish hicks make the residents of Hooterville look sophisticated. Liz is a trampy sexpot who seems to have wandered in from a Tennessee Williams play. (At one point, the *MST3K* comics joke that the movie has morphed into *The Night of the Iguana*.) Vickers is terrific as the sultry vixen who seduces everyone around her but keeps them all at arm's length.

Liz and her would-be lover are abducted by the leeches and held in an underwater cavern. The man-sized mutations are played by stunt men in rubber costumes that look like rain ponchos. The director wisely keeps them in the shadows, giving us only a glimpse now and then. To the movie's credit, there are a few memorably chilling scenes of the leeches sucking blood from the necks of their victims (with disturbing sound effects added in).

There's some murky, confusing underwater footage of two scuba divers supposedly fighting with the leeches. After that, game warden Steve Benton (Ken Clark) decides that environmentalism is for sissies and dumps 100 sticks of dynamite into the bog to kill the creatures. An empty, unsatisfying finale. This film cries out for an exciting fight to the finish with the repulsive blood suckers, but we don't get it.



Yvette Vickers (above) started out as a model and even posed for Russ Meyer. She was *Playboy's* Playmate of the Month, July 1959. Her seductive centerfold pose may have led to her being cast in this film. She is still fondly remembered for this

role and her supporting part in *Attack of the 50 Foot Woman* (she would have been great in the lead). Despite a solid and surprisingly nuanced performance in *Leeches*, this, sadly, did not lead to bigger and better things. Her filmography is uniformly uninteresting.

Beast from Haunted Cave (1959) - The only film from Gene Corman Productions gets honorable mention. A crime drama and character study with an offbeat horror twist. Filmed at a South Dakota ski resort, back-to-back with *Ski Troop Attack* (another Roger Corman indie with the same cast and writer). Bank robbers pull off a gold heist then ski to a cabin hideout owned by an instructor. Meanwhile they are followed by a giant spider-man creature. Similar to *Attack of the Giant Leeches*, this features a strong female role (a sexy, seductive gangster moll) and disturbing scenes of a blood-sucking monster feeding on human victims in its cave lair. We never get a good look at the creature. Essentially a guy wearing what looks like a hunter's ghillie suit covered in webs with long spider-like legs.

The surprisingly well-written script has good characters and sharp dialog that avoids the usual gangster movie clichés. Stalwart, nature-loving ski instructor Gil (Michael Forest) is drawn to cynical, old-beyond-her-years Gypsy (Sheila Noonan). She is so good in this role it's a shame her career went nowhere. Linne Ahlstrand is also good in a small barmaid part. Like Yvette Vickers, she, too, posed for *Playboy* (July, 1958).

First film directed by talented but relatively obscure Monte Hellman. He went on to direct a pair of offbeat art-westerns with Jack Nicholson (*The Shooting*, *Ride in the Whirlwind*) and the seldom seen but superb *Two-Lane Blacktop* (1971), a film I hope to review in an upcoming issue on counter-culture cinema.

The Decade in Retrospect

Taken as a whole, these films reveal a number of things about the cultural mindset of the time. The changing attitude toward teenagers (although motivated by commercial interests) has them going from annoying victims to slightly less annoying heroes. As the decade progressed, more horror and science fiction stories emerged with a youth-oriented point of view. AIP was the first to

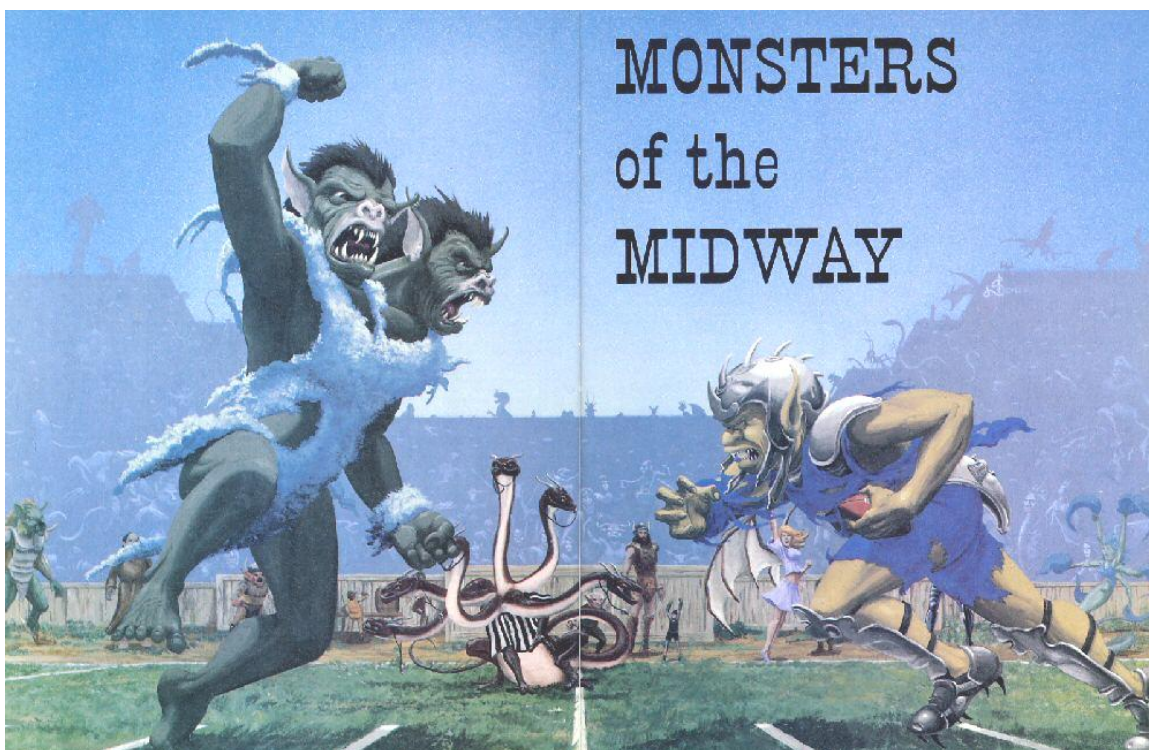
discover (and exploit) the word “teenager” in film titles in the same way “atomic” had been used to sell tickets earlier in the decade.

Old-fashioned female stereotypes were still firmly in place, but with the right kind of eyes one can see cracks beginning to form in the facade. Peggie Castle in *The Beginning of the End* and Mara Corday in *The Black Scorpion* (to say nothing about action-heroine *Panther Girl of the Kongo*) are fairly strong, independent characters — even though the scripts require them to be rescued and scream in terror now and then. Most noteworthy is Faith Domergue in *It Came from Beneath the Sea*. An overbearing Kenneth Tobey spends the whole picture hitting on her, with little effect. The amusing finale is ambiguous with Domergue more or less brushing him off. Seen today, her character seems remarkably modern.

Most intriguing is the total lack of guilt or even basic accountability in all of these man-made disaster stories. The reckless drop-it-anywhere testing of nuclear bombs, radioactive fallout and other blunders of science create (or unleash) horrific, highly destructive monsters in film after film. Yet no one bothers to assign any blame or suggest we should perhaps be a tad more careful next time. There's none of that “we tampered in God's domain” sentiment seen in older horror films. (The one exception is in *Them!* where the absent-minded professor muses that a plague of giant ants could be the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy.) Perhaps the writers felt that the moral aspect was already implied and didn't want to slow down the action (or depress the audience) with distracting social commentary. Nuclear disaster is simply a plot point that gets the story moving and is never mentioned again. The protagonists always accept the situation at face value and are immediately preoccupied with the business of killing the resulting mutant monster.

Given the liberal nature of Hollywood, and especially its screenwriters, the oppressive political climate of the time must also be considered. The Red Scare of McCarthyism loomed over Hollywood like a black cloud. Suspected communists (mostly writers and directors) were publicly denounced in televised

Continued on page 32



Steven H Silver

At one time in the distant past, the University of Chicago fielded a college football team, known as the Maroons. They began playing in 1892 under head coach Amos Alonzo Stagg, who remained in his position until 1932, when he left Chicago for the West Coast.

Beginning in 1893, the Maroons played their home games at Marshall Field, named for the businessman and philanthropist who donated the land, Marshall Field (he also founded the eponymous department store which has since been rebranded). By 1913, Marshall Field (the stadium) underwent its own re-branding, now named in honor of Coach Stagg.

The University of Chicago Maroons were a power house team in under Stagg, winning national championships in 1905 and 1913, as well as seven Big Ten Conference Championships between 1899 and 1924. Ten of the players, as well as Stagg, would eventually find themselves inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame, including Jay Berwanger, who joined the team the year after

Stagg left, and was the first recipient of the Downtown Athletic Club Trophy (later the Heisman Award). This prowess on the field caused the team to earn the nickname “The Monsters of the Midway.”

The Midway Plaisance was laid out around the same time the Maroon began to play football. It served as the center for amusements at the World’s Columbian Exposition, the World’s Fair that took place in Chicago in 1893. The Midway, named for its location on the fairgrounds, has since given its name to similar areas at county fairs and amusement parks throughout the country. The original Midway still exists as a grassy area sandwiched between 59th Street on the north and 60th Street on the south, connecting Washington Park on the west with Jackson Park on the east. Most of the University of Chicago lies just north of the park, although some of the university lies to the south. Two blocks north of the Midway stands the Regenstein Library, built on the site of the old Stagg Field, which was torn down in 1957.

The Chicago Maroons did not last long past the Amos Alonzo Stagg days. After he left, Clark Shaughnessy replaced him from 1933 until 1939. Shaughnessy inherited a team in disarray, made more difficult by a new testing schedule that interfered with the players' ability to practice for games. By the end of the decade, the team had accumulated a record under Shaughnessy of a miserable 17-34-4, including a season in which they lost all of their Big Ten Conference games. Another part of the problem was U of C President Robert Maynard Hutchins, strongly felt that football was a "major handicap to education in the United States." Following the 1939 season, Hutchins arranged to have the program disbanded. When asked about his decision to "de-emphasize" football, Hutchins replied, "I did not de-emphasize football at the University of Chicago, I abolished it." The original Monsters of the Midway were no more.

A few years after Hutchins abolished football, the derelict Stagg Field was used by Enrico Fermi as the site for Chicago Pile-1, located under the west viewing stands. On December 2, 1942, Fermi began the first man-made self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction in the pile. Twenty-eight minutes after the pile went critical, Fermi shut it down. Eventually, in February of the following year, the pile was dismantled and moved to Argonne Forest in Cook County, which had been the intended site for the pile until a labor strike made the use of Stagg Field necessary, the new site became the original location of the Argonne National Laboratory, which has since moved to DuPage County.

Once among the mightiest of teams, by the 1960s, memories of the original Monsters of the Midway were distant, to the degree that one of the all-time classic skit performed at Chicago's Second City in 1961, performed by Alan Arken, Severn Darden, Andrew Duncan, and Eugene Troobnick, was called "Football Comes to the University of Chicago." (you can hear it at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xd_1Zlo2hM). In 1963, football did return to the University of Chicago, but only as a club. It wouldn't become an official sport again until 1969.

However, the Monsters of the Midway were to be reborn!

Beginning in 1940, the year after Hutchins disbanded the football program, the Chicago Bears won the NFL Championship, and repeated their victory in 1941, as well as in 1943 and 1946. Chicagoans are extremely proud of their city and its history, and really don't like to let things go (for instance, 9 years after Marshall Field's was re-branded, many Chicagoans still refuse to call it by its new name, and many others won't shop there as long as the new moniker is in place). Seeing the Chicago Bears of the 1940s as a rebirth of the powerhouse U of C Maroons of an earlier era, the name Monsters of the Midway transferred itself from the collegiate team to the pro team, even though the Chicago Bears played in a stadium a dozen miles north of the university: Wrigley Field.

After the great Bears teams of the 40s disappeared, the name went into abeyance. In 1985, when Mike Ditka coached the Bears to a 15-1 season that ended in a blow out of the New England Patriots, the name was revitalized for the team, especially its defensive line. The name has been used to refer to the team ever since.

However, even before Ditka gained ascendance in Chicago, in 1982, the year Ditka became the Bears' coach, the name made a minor resurgence, not among football fans, but among gamers. In the September 1982 issue of *The Dragon* (#65), rather than publishing an adventure, they published a game (which they often did) written by Gali Sanchez. The two-player game was a football simulation game played with Dungeons and Dragons creatures, including kobolds, ettins, treants, giants, and so forth. Different creatures had different special abilities, making some better for defense, others for offense. Certain types of magic could also be deployed. In a strange break from football, each team consisted of 10 plays instead of the traditional 11.



MONSTERS OF THE MIDWAY

Mike Resnick

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SURPRISES ON TAP? *July 12, 2037 (UPI)*

Coach Rattler Renfro, in his initial press conference, has promised fans that his Chicago Bears, coming off a pair of 1-and-15 seasons, will sport a new look this season. When asked to explain why training camp will be closed to both the press and the public, Renfro merely smiled and said, "No comment."

BEARS TAKE OPENER, 76-0

September 4, 2037 (AP) The "New Look" Chicago Bears made their debut this afternoon, beating last year's Super Bowl winners, the North Dakota Timberwolves, by a league-record score of 76-0. The Timberwolves were a 22-point favorite.

Coach Rattler Renfro unveiled an all-new offensive line, consisting of five rookies, all free agents who had never played organized football before. They are right tackle Jumbo Smith (8'4", 603 pounds), right guard Willie "The Whale" McPherson (7'10", 566 pounds), center Hannibal Cohen (8'3", 622 pounds), left guard Mountain O'Mara (7'8", 559 pounds), and the biggest of them all, right tackle Tiny Tackenheim (8'7", 701 pounds).

"Hell, I could have run through the holes those guys made," said Timberwolves coach Rocket Ryan. "I don't know where Renfro recruited them, but they're just awesome."

After three decades in eclipse, it looks like the Bears are once again the Monsters of the Midway.

BEARS WIN FOURTH STRAIGHT, 88-7 *October 2, 2037 (AP)* "Those guys just ain't

human!" said Montana Buttes' linebacker Jocko Schmidt from his hospital bed, after his team had suffered an 88-7 mauling at the hands of the Chicago Bears. "That Tackenheim ought to be in a zoo, not on a football field!"

NFL INVESTIGATES CHARGES

October 24, 2037 (UPI) The National Football League has announced that they are probing into an alleged connection between Nobel Prize winner Dr. Alfredo RATHERMANN and the Chicago Bears. RATHERMANN, who won his award for his pioneering work in the animation of dead tissue, was unavailable for comment.

George Halas VI, owner and general manager of the Bears, who lead their division with a 7-0 record, termed the allegations "ridiculous".

BEARS CLINCH TITLE, LOOK TO SUPER BOWL *December 25, 2037 (UPI)* The Chicago Bears celebrated Christmas with a 68-3 thrashing of the Mississippi Riverboats, thus becoming the first NFL team this century to conclude its regular-season schedule unbeaten and untied. The Monsters of the Midway looked awesome as the offensive line opened up hole after hole for Chicago's running backs.

Coach Rattler Renfro, in his post-game press conference, praised the Riverboats and said that he was looking forward to the playoffs. When questioned about the ongoing investigation of the dealings between the Bears and Dr. Alfredo RATHERMANN, he simply shrugged and said, "Hey, I'm just a coach. You'll have to speak to the Commissioner about that."



RATHERMANN ADMITS ALL!

December 28, 2037 (UPI) Nobel Prize press conference with Roger Jamison, Commissioner of the National Football League, and admitted that the five starting

Members of the Chicago Bears' offensive line are actually scientific constructs, created from bits and pieces of other human beings.

This revelation seemed certain to win another Nobel for Dr. Rathermann, but the more important issue of whether linemen Smith, McPherson, Cohen, O'Mara, and Tackenheim will be allowed to compete in the upcoming NFL playoffs remains undecided at present. Commissioner Jamison promised a ruling before the Bears meet the Las Vegas Gamblers in eleven days.

NFL RULES ON "MONSTERS" *January 3, 2038 (AP)* Commissioner Roger Jamison held a press conference this morning, in which he outlined the NFL's policy on the Chicago Bears' offensive line.

"After extended meetings with our attorneys and the NFL Players Union, we have amended the rules to state that football is a game played by natural-born human beings," said Commissioner Jamison. "If we were to permit an endless string of Dr. Rathermann's creations to play in the NFL, the day would soon arrive when not a single natural-born human could make an NFL roster, and while it would certainly make the games more exciting, we question whether the public is ready for such a change at this time.

"However," he added, "our attorneys inform us that we have no legal basis for denying Smith, McPherson, Cohen, O'Mara, and Tackenheim the right to play in this season's post-season competition, since the rule was changed after they made the Bears' roster."

The owners of the 47 other NFL teams have filed an official protest, demanding that the players in question be barred from the upcoming playoffs.

BEARS WIN 77-10, SUPER BOWL NEXT *January 15, 2038 (UPI)* The Chicago Bears beat the Hawaii Volcanos 77-10 this afternoon to advance to the Super Bowl. They

overcame a 10-0 first-quarter deficit after the Supreme Court overturned the injunction barring linemen Smith, McPherson, Cohen, O'Mara and Tackenheim from playing. The ruling came down at 1:37 PM, and the Bears took the lead, never to relinquish it, at 1:43 PM.

"MONSTERS DON'T SCARE US," SAYS McNAB *January 22, 2038 (UPI)* With the Super Bowl only a week away, and the Chicago Bears a 45-point favorite, Coach Terry McNab of the Alaskan Malamutes said that his team didn't fear the Monsters of the Midway, and looked forward to the challenge.

When asked how his defensive line, which will be giving away an average of 327 pounds per man, would cope with their offensive counterparts on the Bears, he merely smiled and said that he was working on a strategy.

The Bears are expected to be 50-point favorites by the opening kickoff.

McNAB MISSES PRACTICE *January 24, 2038 (UPI)* Coach Terry McNab was missing from the Alaskan Malamutes' practice this afternoon. Club officials had no comment.

RATHERMAN RESURFACES *January 26, 2038 (UPI)* Nobel Prize winner Alfredo Rathermann, who had been in seclusion since December 28, was spotted sitting in the stands, watching the Alaskan Malamutes prepare for their Super Bowl meeting with the Chicago Bears.

When asked if he had a rooting interest in the game, Rathermann replied that his interest was "strictly professional." He was later seen having dinner with Coach McNab and the owners of the Malamutes.

BEARS GO TO COURT TO BAR McNAB FROM SUPER BOWL *January 28, 2038 (AP)* With the revelation that Coach Terry McNab's skull now houses two brains—his own and that of Professor Steven Hawkings, which had been cryogenically frozen upon his death in 1998—the Chicago Bears went to court in an attempt to stop McNab from appearing on the sidelines during tomorrow's Super Bowl.

McNab's physician, Dr. Alfredo Rathermann, called the Bears ownership "poor sportsmen" and pointed out that since McNab will

not be playing, his presence will not break the NFL's controversial new policy.

"Besides," said McNab as a hastily-called press conference, "I'm still the same 183-pound 57-year-old man I was last week. How can sharing the late Dr. Hawkings' brain pose a threat to the Bears? Do I look like a Monster of the Midway?"

COURT RULES FOR McNAB *January 28, 2038 (UPI)* The U.S. District Court ruled that Coach Terry McNab's presence will not conflict with stated NFL policy, and that he will be allowed on the field when his Alaskan Malamutes, who are 53-point underdogs, meet the Chicago Bears in tomorrow's Super Bowl.

MALAMUTES UPSET BEARS, 7-3 *January 29, 2038 (AP)* In one of the great upsets of all time, the Alaskan Malamutes beat the Chicago Bears 7-3 in Super Bowl LXXIII.

Using unorthodox formations and attacking from strange angles, the Malamutes' new "Vector Defense" smothered the supposedly-unstoppable Bears running game. Quarterback Pedro Cordero hit tight end Bennie Philander with a 9-yard touchdown pass at 3:12 of the fourth quarter for the winning score.

When asked how his defense managed to penetrate the vaunted Bears line, Coach Terry McNab's only comment was "E = MC²"

MAJOR OVERHAUL FOR BEARS *February 19, 2038 (UPI)* In the wake of their devastating defeat in the Super Bowl, the Chicago Bears have fired Coach Rattler Renfro, and given unconditional releases to linemen Jumbo Smith, Willie the Whale McPherson, Hannibal Cohen, Mountain O'Mara, and Tiny Tackenheim.

All five players expressed hope that they could start new careers in the World Wrestling Federation.



Amazing Colossal Monsters

Continued from page 26

hearings and blacklisted. In this witch-hunt atmosphere, any critical remark about the government or the military could be interpreted as anti-American and therefore pro-communist.

It is not surprising, then, that the heroes in these films — government-funded research scientists and hawkish military leaders — are cut from the same patriotic cloth. They generally come across as conservative Eisenhower Republicans who would never dream of saying anything critical about our society, the government, the military or atomic bomb testing. And if radiation totally screws up the ecosystem, well, humanity will just have to tough it out. Science created this mess so, science will also provide an answer.

Looking at the science fiction films of the fifties, only two — Bradbury's *It Came from Outer Space* (1953) and *The Cosmic Man* (1959) — dare to suggest a pacifist, "we might be wrong" attitude. *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* can lean left or right depending on how one looks at it. Some interpret the sinister, hive-like pod people as the embodiment of communist ideology. Others, including star Kevin McCarthy, saw it as a biting commentary on the way mind-numbing advertising is turning us into passive, zombie-like drones. Either way, both Madison Avenue and the government went to great lengths to make us forget our Cold War fears and assure us that a bright future of prosperity and technological wonders was inevitable. Meanwhile, an exceedingly weird, nightmarish group of science-based monster movies emerged from our collective subconscious that suggested things might not be as swell as we were led to believe.

Jim Ivers is an artist (kind of) and a part-time writer/editor (sort of) in Connecticut currently publishing the vintage movie genre-zine "Mostly Retro", which is frequently available for a few paltry quatloos on eBay.





Five homies in search of a pick-up basketball game? Nope – it's the author with Fred Pohl, James Gunn, Brian Aldiss and Jack Williamson, standing by a Saturn V in Houston.

THE STATE OF THE MAGAZINES

Some opinions harvested from Locus online and correspondence by

Gregory Benford

The once powerful sf magazines have declined in circulation over the last 35 years, and seem endangered. The 1980 circulations vs 2014 of the magazines are: *Analog* (100,000; 25,000), *Asimov's* (100,000; 20,000); *F&SF* (60,000; 12,000), with *Interzone* now having something less than 10,000. Plainly, they're in trouble. Meanwhile many other venues in small or online sites has increased the story market. But what of quality and content? I asked this of several people, starting by circulating Lois Tilton's **locusmag.com** year summary:

Lois Tilton (appearing at locusmag.com): Looking back over 2014 to pick my favorite stories, I don't see it as a really good year for short SF. From many directions come charges that the field has fallen into a rut, and the evidence

doesn't strongly dispute it. Subterranean Press discontinued its high-quality magazine and no new periodicals have yet risen to replace it, although *Uncanny* shows promise. Overall, my assessment of this year's stories would have to be: lackluster.

Most disappointing were the old-line print periodicals. There was plenty of good-enough fiction published, but few stories that made me sit up in awe and think: "I wish I could have written that." I found a lot more outstanding pieces of fiction in the electronic periodicals, most notably *Tor.com* and *Clarkesworld*. It was also a good year for anthologies, especially for Hard SF of which I see far too little in the periodicals.

This year's new author of promise is J Y Yang.

PRINT PERIODICALS

F&SF

If the field is in a rut, it's most visible here. Only a few years ago, I recall selecting more stories for my list from this magazine than just about any other venue. Now, not so many. And it's noteworthy that most of these came from a guest-edited issue: Paul M Berger's "Subduction" and Spencer Ellsworth's "Five Tales of the Aqueduct". Fortunately, the zine continues to publish Robert Reed, although his contributions here this year were not my favorites, and the ever-entertaining Matthew Hughes. I also liked Sarah Pinsker's "A Stretch of Highway Two Lanes Wide". But this is a decline, overall, from better days.

Asimov's

At one point, this magazine used to vie with *F&SF* for the honor of premier source of short fiction in the genre. While the zine is less addicted to the work of the same regular authors, it still isn't publishing a lot of new, exciting work. It did give us what I consider Robert Reed's best piece of the year: "The Cryptic Age". I also liked Derek Künsken's "Schools of Clay".

Analog

Here, stasis would seem to be a feature, not a bug, but given this, I found the quality of the fiction on the upgrade, the best being Craig DeLancey's "Racing the Tide".

Interzone

This just-as-venerable print magazine definitely showed that it's open to change, continuing a shift from dark future dystopias to more optimistic works that include actual fantasy. The best here is still SF, however, such as Nina Allen's sophisticated "Mirielenia". I also liked new author D. J. Cockburn's debut piece, "Beside the Dammed River", with a fresh look at dystopia.

ANTHOLOGIES

I've been known to complain in the past that I see too few original anthologies, but 2014 gave me more than I managed to read. The year had a particularly good crop of Hard SF collections, and

I'm not going to complain about too much Hard SF.

Hieroglyph

This one was created by a collective headed by Neal Stephenson on a mission to pull SF out of its rut and imbue it with a sense of "techno-optimism." There's good stuff here, real science fiction, which is all too rare on today's publishing scene. Among these stories, I especially like the realistic, probable futures portrayed by Geoffrey A. Landis in "A Hotel in Antarctica" and by Cory Doctorow in "The Man Who Sold the Moon".

Reach for Infinity

Another good SF anthology from Jonathan Strahan, the theme being human expansion into space. The best stories are "The Fifth Dragon" by Ian McDonald and "Kheldyu" by Karl Schroeder.

Fearsome Magics

Another anthology from Strahan, this one fantasy and not quite as successful as the science fiction volume. I best liked "On Skybolt Mountain" by Justina Robson.

Carbide-Tipped Pens is another Hard SF anthology, not as good as its title, edited by Ben Bova and Eric Choi. It has a nice piece by Gregory Benford: "Lady with Fox".

Gregory Benford to those below:

I wondered if you agree with Lois Tilton's assessment of the 2014 year in *Locus* online: that the print mags aren't getting the more interesting stories now. You presumably read them all: do you agree?

Gardner Dozois

To some extent, I do agree. *Asimov's*, *F&SF*, and *Interzone* were on the weak side this year. That may just be the way things happened to fall out this year, though. Your best bet for finding good stories this year were the SF anthologies, particularly *Reach for Infinity* and *Hieroglyph*.

Gordon Van Gelder

I just saw you asking Gardner about Lois Tilton's year-end assessment and it really drove home

something I've noticed for a while: the younger writers nowadays really don't write science fiction any more. That's why better SF stories are showing up in anthologies – newbies aren't competing with the more accomplished writers. (On a side note, I think it's also striking that the only two stories Gardner is reprinting from F&SF this year are not by American writers.)

Jonathan Strahan:

I think there's some truth to Lois's assessment, though I have come to a slightly different conclusion. I think the magazines are losing out to editors who are actively inviting writers to be involved in projects (which are proliferating), meaning those writers often don't send stories to general markets. Anthologies seem to be an important place right now. Tor.com is an exception to this, but mostly because it is such a lucrative market. They also have some very energetic editors looking for work. I think the magazines, especially the online magazines, have a different problem: they don't have very distinct personalities and that impacts on building readership. You always know what to expect from *Analog*, and I always felt like I knew what to expect from *Asimov's* under Gardner's editorship or *F&SF* under Gordon or Ed's. I don't get a distinct personality with *Lightspeed* or *Clarkesworld* et al yet, despite their qualities, and I think that's an issue.

Gregory Benford:

Jonathan, that's a major aspect, probably best visible mostly to you magazine editors. I hadn't even thought of that. But ... why should it be that "newbies aren't competing with the more accomplished writers"? Maybe the threshold of science knowledge is too high now?

Gordon Van Gelder:

I wish I had an opportunity to sit and chat with you about this – there are too many facets to it for an online conversation. But among the things I'm seeing are:

(1) A lot of younger writers and readers don't actually distinguish between science fiction and fantasy.

(2) Many of the up-and-coming younger writers don't see any advantage to writing science fiction. Fantasy wins more awards, sells better, and has more markets. (David Truesdale reprinted a 1975 interview

<http://www.tangentonline.com/interviews-columnsmenu-166/1221-classic-donald-a-wollheim-interview-->

with Don Wollheim where he said, "I've just found this great new novel in the slushpile. It reads like fantasy, but don't worry – it's science fiction." Can you imagine any editor saying something like that now? [Wollheim was speaking of Tanith Lee's first novel.]

(3) The ones who do write science fiction seem to be interested mostly in computer-related stuff – Artificial Intelligence, etc. Nothing wrong with that, but I don't see enough on other themes.

Incidentally, I ran this piece by Stephen Mazur, who has been my first reader for a few years. He said he sees three kinds of science fiction in the slushpile:

1) Computer-based SF stories about AI, programming, etc.

2) Sci-fi stories about zipping around space via wormholes

3) Lite SF that uses the trappings of the genre, such as time-travel.

Of course, he sees the bottom-of-the-barrel stuff, but it's still of interest. I remember when Adam-and-Eve stories were filling the slushpile; nowadays, they're rare.

Gregory Benford:

The above and several other editors have told me an interesting fact: Despite about 2000 members of SFWA, the magazines (except *Analog*) seem to get far more fantasy than sf, and very little hard sf. All the magazines have faced declining circulations for decades and some seem barely hanging on. Yet sf/fantasy publishes the majority

of all professional (i.e., paying) short stories in English. (There are a few mystery story markets too.) Mainstream markets are tiny (I estimate, from much browsing and fact-chasing). In this sense the success of the sf/fantasy magazines, online and print, looms as a troubling aspect for all literature, not merely one genre.

As well, as Jon says: “those writers perhaps never send stories to general markets” – indeed, is true of me. The few stories I write in a year usually go on commission to anthologies.

David Truesdale:

All this gets us back to the \$64 question of why readers aren’t reading or buying SF (hard or otherwise) like they used to, in favor of fantasy. And here I make a distinction between short fiction in the magazines and SF in novel form. The sort of SF which is very popular these days is media tie-in SF. There’s still a huge buying audience for *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* (and other franchises) catering to those who’ve seen the movies and loved them, but who aren’t finding what they know they like in the magazines. Kris Rusch wrote a piece for *Asimov’s* a number of years ago outlining this fact

(http://www.asimovs.com/_issue_0612/thoughtexperiments.shtml).

Agree or not, sales figures are hard to deny. This decline in popularity of “hard” SF has been coming for a long time, and while it’s been an incremental shift away from SF to Fantasy in the past, it may have reached the boiling point with the state of the current magazines – print and electronic. Sheila Finch warned the field of this with her essay “Doctor, Will the Patient Survive?”

(<http://www.tangentonline.com/articles-columnsmenu-284/2422-qdoctor-will-the-patient-surviveq-by-sheila-finch>)

which appeared in *Nebula Awards 30*, 1996. She saw less and less real SF in the short fiction she was reading and more attempts at fiction that tried to be “literary.” A quote from her essay:

“Gary Wolfe once referred to this trend as ‘creeping mainstreamism’: a trend that produces stories that embrace all the

aspects of literary fiction, style, character development, and so on, but lose the element of speculativeness that marks science fiction. What we’re all too likely to find in the magazines these days (with *Analog* a notable exception) is the story that might just as well have appeared in *The New Yorker* or any of the literary journals. What’s happened here?”

James Gunn has noted elsewhere that he sees part of the problem as stemming from a generation of college students arriving to SF out of the soft sciences and humanities than the math or sciences departments. Thus, their attempts to write “SF” reflect this non-science background in their fiction.

But what exacerbates the problem is that many of the current crop of editors – print or online – are coming out of the same colleges and universities with the same background in the softer disciplines as the writers submitting to them. If the editors truly had an understanding of the history of the SF field—how and why it came to be, its struggles as a new form of literature distinct from the quotidian emphasis the “mainstream” has always made its living promoting as the only true form of Literature – then perhaps at least some of these younger or newer editors could guide their writers in a direction more compatible with SF rather than Fantasy or thinly disguised (as Finch notes) mainstream stories.

All of these elements are now coalescing into what alarms many of us today, but has been seething beneath the surface for decades. In slow increments these various processes have now bubbled to the surface. I fear even armchair science SF, much less Hard SF in the short form, is the boiling frog in the pot.

Gregory Benford:

Now, to conclude with a savvy editor:

David Hartwell:

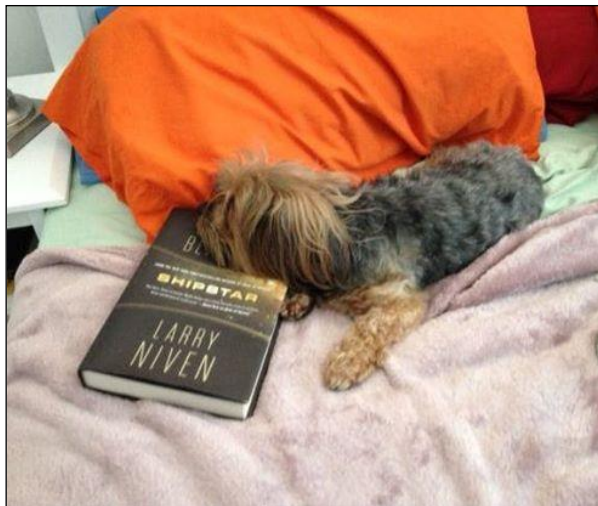
The mainstream no longer distinguishes between fantasy and science fiction, it never really did, and the media certainly do not. And everyone in the field used to take it for granted that it was easier

to write a good publishable fantasy than a good publishable SF story, which requires some bit of scientific knowledge. It was a commonplace in discussion. Always, of course, with the reminder that it is very hard to write a truly first rate short story of any kind, and no year contains a lot of those, of the thousands being published.

So younger writers saturated with media in the last two decades, and not in fact nearly as well read in SF as the fans of old, say in effect “same difference” and shout down anyone who disagrees. I know younger editors who are not really clear on genre distinctions and don’t think it matters.

This battle is being not lost but drowned in noise. And the mainstream still thinks it’s all the same and all crap. With exceptions that prove the rule. The only thing to do if one likes hard SF is to praise it and publish it, and read it, and criticize editors who don’t publish enough of it as ignorant or slackers.

The bottom line is that there are literally thousands of published but less than truly excellent fantasy and SF writers now, never mind the self-published, and that are desperate not to be judged in comparison with others, especially older and established writers. We all know that is scary. So they deny the existence of any rules, any boundaries, so they cannot be judged. My only answer is, judge them anyway.



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Artwork by RANDY CLEARY and NANCY MAYBERRY



Bigfoot

Gigantopithecus imaginationus

Bigfoot Sasquatch Mapinguari The Tall
Man Yiren
Batutut Hibagon Hairy Wild Man Orang
Pendek
Mogollon Monster Swamp Ape Yowie
Himalayan Yeti
or simply the good old Abominable
Snowman—
call us what you will but doubt us only
if you dare because we're everywhere.
We screech and shriek break your
windows
steal and eat your hogs and goats
sheep and chickens make thunderous
tree knocks and quiet nests of leaf litter
and twigs.
We're not ghosts or vampires
werewolves, bogeymen or
Neanderthals
we're Bigfoots damn it! proud
humanoids
just like you even though
you can't find us – ha ha – we leave
only
our footprints and tufts of hair behind
to tantalize you so you bet we're out
there all right
somewhere in your darkest night.
We are on our way to your front door!

Giant Huntsman Spider

Heteropoda maxima

Fortunately for you people we live
secluded
in caves in rocky crags
along underground rivers
for we are formidable hideous
creatures
big as dinner plates with long hairy
crab-like legs
the largest spiders in the world.
If you find yourself spelunking in
Laos
and happen to stumble upon us
and for some perverted reason wish
to investigate us further get to know
us better
heed my advice and remember to pick us up
by our legs only or else . . .
ecky ecky ecky

Vampire Bat

Desmodus rotundus

We are the only mammals on the planet
(discounting Dracula and his vampire
buddies)
to live entirely on blood
after dark leaving our belfries, bridges, attics
and caves
flying out to find ourselves a nice fat cow
horse pig or goat bite in tiny and suck
they feel nothing because our anticoagulant
has a dram of anesthesia mixed in
clever little carnivores aren't we.

Some people think we are nasty ugly little
fuckers
particularly when we scurry along
on our stumpy wing-legs and hiss.
But we have few enemies
although there are the coachwhip snakes
that hang out near cave entrances
snatch us from of the air
as we stream by heading out
to fill our bellies with blood
you cannot believe
how fast those damn bastards are

Grendel

Gigantopithecus gardarensis

One of Beowulf's monsters
descended directly from Cain
numero uno murderer
I was not a Dragon a Werewolf a Wildman or
a Griffin
not a Monocerus Manticore Minotaur or
the Malebranche Demon but just a garden
variety
giant humanoid THING
hairier and smellier much stronger
more hideous and fearsome
than you could imagine in your brain's wild
toad ride
twice as big as the biggest Bigfoot
(oh they exist don't be fooled by the lack of
evidence
I should know they are distant cousins)



Dark Age humans were easy pickings
huddled trembling
in their flimsy meadhalls and longhouses
their Fachhallenhausen and Frisian
farmsteads
sturdy secure timber structures my ass

I'd just crack in the front door PIFF!
they'd be standing staring all agog
then scattering like twigs in the wind
a few insane brave ones poking at me with
pikes
or pick axes until I'd snatch them up
for dinner and CHOMP DOWN
and be on my way back to my den

The system worked fine and was fun
until fuckhead Beowulf showed up
playing the hero tearing off
my arm first and then . . . well you know

Are there more of me lurking still
in the darkest shadows of the blackest
forests?
Well I can't tell you that directly I'm sworn to
secrecy
but there have been sightings there have
been reports
look everything skulking about out there can't
be
teensy pip-squeak Bigfoots now can they?

By the way, have you met my mother?

Werewolf

Lycanthrope

Oh yes there are ancient pagan legends,
prehistoric myths
but we wolf-man beasts didn't come into our
own
until the Dark Ages in a Europe bulging
with too many people (before the Black Death
rolled through and culled the herd)
such easy pickings forcing us out of the
shadows.

But I, *La Bête du Gévaudan* was the first truly
to be verified
given recognition and acclamation
beginning back in 1764 in the little bumpkin
French town
of Gévaudan hence my name given me
outright
from the start after I tore the throat
out of some moronic peasant villager then
killed

and mutilated a lovely 14 year old farmer's
daughter.

Over a period of only 3 years from 1764 to
1767

102 people (give or take) in total (put that
in you Guinness Book of World Records if
you dare)

were killed by me and me alone, mauled
mangled decapitated dismembered
disemboweled even sexually abused (only
the girls)

as I became more bored and disillusioned
than normal.

But it's all their own damn fault truly.

No reason for me to have to live in damp
dank caves

and hunt at night by the light of the moon
magically transforming beneath the light of
the full moon

from man to wolf (just kidding about that part I
was always a half-man half-wolf creature but
don't ask me

how that happened I have no idea honestly I
don't)

I got out of control because of them for I
could have

been bargained with if only they had tried . . .

if only those stupid peasants had attempted
to understand me

rather than fear and loath me cast me out!

Let's get him they shouted

Kill the beast! Kill the beast! Cut its throat!

they chanted

(although in French of course)

chasing about the countryside with pitchforks
and torches

trying to find me trying to string me up burn
me

shoot me with these stupid silver bullets
(who makes this crap up, seriously, who?)

And no, just to set the record straight, I am
not

a fucking giant hyena or a wolf-dog hybrid

or a demented psychopath in a wolf's skin or

a bear

or trained mastiff or a pack of wild warthogs

or rogue dogs...

I am a Werewolf plain and simple.
 I am the first official Wolfman to stalk the land
 and through the mists in your nightmares
 and you had goddamn well better learn to treat me
 with more respect because I'm not going away anytime soon
 and there are plenty more 14 year old farmer's daughters
 for me to terrorize rape mutilate and eat.

Minotaur

Asterion minotaurus

I'm the victim do you hear me!
 I'm the fucking victim here!
 My mother Pasiphaë satisfying her unquenchable lust
 (damn Aphrodite) by copulating with a bull – a damn bull!
 Who does that, seriously WHO!
 My mother that's who and what am I supposed to do with that image
 where am I supposed to put it not to mention having to deal with it psychologically.

So of course I'm born a hideous monster
 a slaveringly insane ferocious half-man half-beast
 scared the bejesus outta everybody I can tell you that
 so they bring in Daedalus the Crafty who constructs
 a vast maze beneath the palace of Knossos as my prison
 to ensure that my life is a living hell.

Well of course I ate people
 it was an age of human sacrifice



loved those succulent virgin girls and boys
 sacrificed to me every 9 years
 what an idiotic thing to ask.
 What else would you have me do stuck
 in that damnable ceaseless labyrinth
 until Ariadne with her stupid ball of twine
 leading the great immortal hero Theseus
 ooohh
 to the very heart of the matter where he . . .
 yes and then there was Theseus what am I to say?
 The perfidious little bastard snuck up on me
 in the dark
 spearing me in the face fucking coward
 how was I supposed to know he was there
 no one was ever there NO ONE! BUT! HA!
 I got the final laugh because I live on yes I do
 you'll be relieved to know I live on immortal
 as the beast in everyman do you hear me!
 DO YOU!
 I am the beast within you man
 at his very worst and shall so remain
 until the end of days.



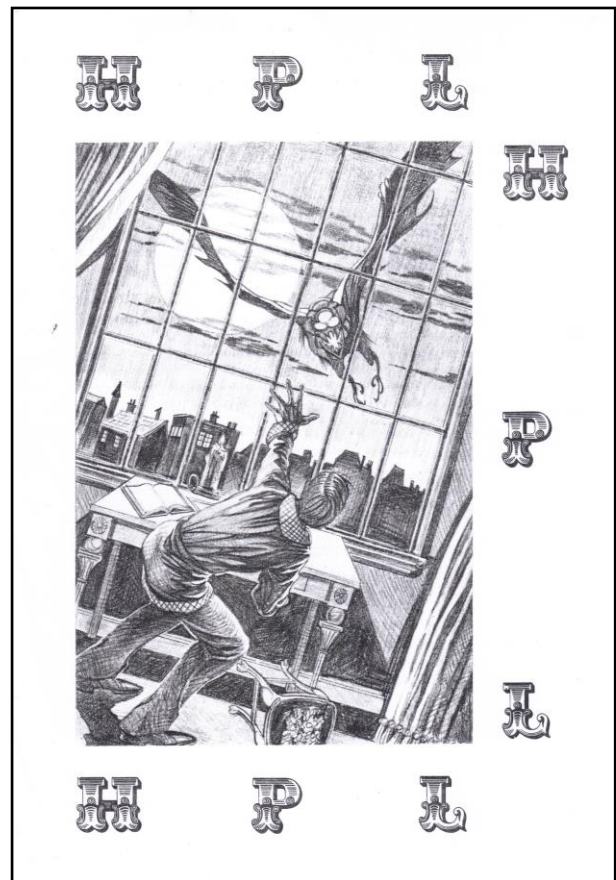
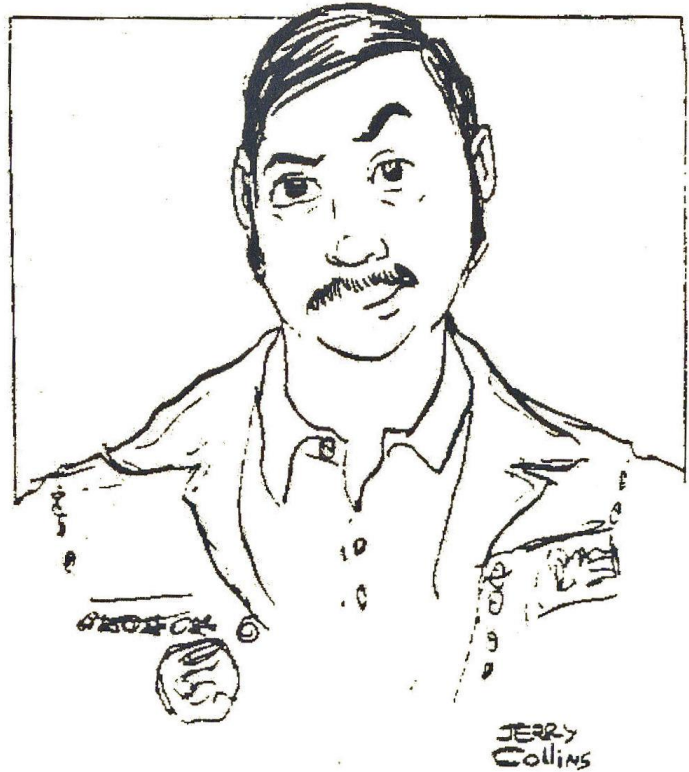
Illo by KURT
ERICHSEN

MY MAIN MAN MEADE... and THE SOUTH'S GREATEST FANZINE

Guy Lillian

In 1971 many great things happened to me. I graduated from UC Berkeley, I fell in love for the first real time, I got accepted into the writing program at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro – and I joined the Southern Fandom Press Alliance. It was thanks to the latter two circumstances that I came to meet Meade Frierson.

This happened in very early 1972. I'd taken the Sunset Limited from New Orleans to Birmingham, en route to Greensboro. I felt a shiver of fear when I spotted the great statue of Vulcan atop the range of hills that cleave the city. I spent my earliest boyhood in B'ham and Vulcan had terrified Childe GHLIII. I was retrieved at the station by my great-aunt and great-uncle, with whom I toured Lillian family sites, visited my grandparents' grave, and supped. They dropped me off at a downtown office building.



Upstairs, I met Meade.

Meade Frierson came from old Suthun money and tradition – like me, he was a “III” (in fact, he founded an amateur press alliance for such as us). He was a partner in a prominent B’ham law firm,



but his love was SF and fantasy. He was one of the South’s preeminent fans – president of the Southern Fandom Confederation, an organization which he didn’t found, but which

grew from his enthusiasm and his frequent *Bulletins*. He was also another SFPA member. On off-white mimeotone, he published a zine called *Huitloxopetl*, a name which I imagined had Aztec significance. And poetry – he’d published widely in his student days (Harvard, University of Virginia) – reams of woozy, boozy blather – it wasn’t for his looks that he was compared to Jack Nicholson in *Easy Rider* – and incessant yammer about “the project” he had in the works. When I’d let him know that I would be passing through B’ham, he insisted that I stay with his family, and so here I was. I do believe that he was the first member of SFPA whom I hadn’t known already that I’d met in person.

My immediate impression? “Jeeze, he’s a grown-up!” This was *his law office*. His desk was a’piled with paper and reference manuals and books and *real work!* He wore a suit! And Meade was *so old* – 32! But he was also friendly and very glad to meet me.

After he finished whatever he was doing we were off for his house in the Birmingham burb called

Woodvale, a thrilling and baffling career through a puzzle of wooded and suburban streets. At Meade’s fine house I met Penny, his beautiful wife, and his two boys. Soon I was shown “the project” – pages for a gigantic fanzine on one of Meade’s pet subjects: H. P. Lovecraft. (His other obsession was old-timey SF radio shows; he had closets full of tapes.)

Meade’s plans for his magazine were amazing – 144 saddle-stitched pages of fiction, criticism, and above all, artwork. He had roped in the best fan artists in the genre: Herb Arnold, Rich Corben (← and →), Steve Fabian, Tim Kirk, John Adkins Richardson and my New Orleans pal Dany Frolich, whose “Cthulhu Rising” was a masterpiece Meade had already run through SFPA. With pride he showed me the masters he had completed, and the art. Being SFPAns, it was inevitable that we celebrate the occasion with a oneshot – a fanzine all SFPAns committed, like crimes, whenever they got together. Of course we had to “go Lovecraft.”

Meade did his SFPAzining on weird yellow stencils – they took a good punch from a typewriter and a good etch from a stylus, but were impossible to read once typed upon. That never stopped Meade and it didn’t stop us. I (badly) traced Dany’s drawing onto one, substituting a bottle of mimeo correction fluid (corflu) for Cthulhu’s head. For the zine beneath it we wrote, in what we hoped would be a tolerable imitation of HPL’s style, an ersatz Lovecraftian tale full of words like “ichorous” and “intolerable” and “ghastly” – appropriate terms for our unspeakably terrible text. We entitled the zine *The Call of K’Orphluu*. I collapsed fairly early for the household – 2AM. On my couch in the family room I entered slumberland listening to the happy clackety-clack sounds of Meade pounding away at the typewriter.

I had truly joined Southern fandom, and in Meade and Penny, made two forever friends.

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That was January, 1972. On March 9, *HPL* went to press. Meade celebrated the event with a SFPazine, *The Shadow over Woodvale*, in which

– lubricated by Jim Beam – he told his fanzine’s tale.

It had started, he said, in April, 1970, when he visited the immortal Virgil Finlay on a buying expedition with Stuart Schiff and Steve Leventhal. Meade forswore HPL material in favor of Schiff and Leventhal, avid collectors of Lovecraft-oriented art, but the visit sparked an idea: “a memorial publication featuring artwork from HPL’s stories and maybe some tributes – mimeo’d of course with the artwork reproduced by quickie press.” The artwork would be original, commissioned HPL material. Meade contacted artists Dave Cockrum and Robert Kline. They weren’t Lovecraft aficionado (Frierson had to send each copies of the stories), and indeed, Cockrum lost interest after doing one painting he disliked (and sold to another collector). Kline assayed a pencil sketch from “The Haunter of the Dark” about which he was also uncertain. Meade bought the art anyway – it would eventually appear on the fanzine’s cover – and thus, with a single piece of artwork in June 1971, was *HPL* born.

Undeterred by the iffy response of Cockrum and Kline, Meade contacted artists he knew through the SFC, including Steve Fabian, who was “quite receptive” to the idea, and Dany Frolich. Dany was a New Orleans fan whose Mardi Gras career – as float designer, poster painter and throw-cup artist – was still in the future. Dany came through with the aforementioned Cthulhu piece. It captivated Meade so much that he printed up a batch to show other artists the sort of scenes he had in mind.

It was in this summertime of ’71 that Frierson met the people who would change his conception of *HPL* from “a half mimeo, half quickie press publication” to the major production it became. Impressed by his cover on a fanzine called *Anomaly*, Meade got in touch with artist Herb Arnold, who showed him a series of works he’d prepped for Arkham House. No artist would contribute more to *HPL*, in volume or in influence. At the DeepSouthCon in New Orleans

and the Worldcon in Boston, Frierson made more connections: Joe Pumilia, just getting the Esoteric Order of Dagon apa underway, and Tom Collins, a Berkeley comrade of mine deeply engaged in his own fanzine project, a mammoth tribute to August Derleth, *Is* #4. Tom spread the word of Meade’s enterprise through *Is* and introduced Meade to Tim Kirk, who promised assistance.

“What about articles and fiction?” Meade writes.

“In September [1971] there was none.

Who did I know? I had addresses on Southern fans, including that of Manly Wade Wellman – how about reprinting a Cthulhu



Mythos story

by him? Permission was granted for *The Terrible Parchment*. Penny and I were delighted! Who else did I know? ... [W]ho would put me in contact with HPL’s friends like J. Vernon Shea, Frank Belknap Long, etc.? I thought of my three years’ correspondence with Stuart Schiff – would he be able to help? Yes, and most willingly. He would interview Long, write to E. Hoffman Price, Robert Bloch, Lin Carter Fritz Leiber for us. Welcome, Associate Editor – Articles.”

Fannish enthusiasm being infectious, interest in the endeavor exploded; as Meade wrote, “the mailbox bulged.” L. Sprague deCamp submitted a poem. Scott Home offered a 9800-word short story. Darrell Schweitzer and Gerry de la Ree came on board. Most impressively, Brian Lumley allowed Meade and Penny to publish the first chapter of a novel he’d submitted to Arkham House. Though nine stories eventually published in *HPL* were professionally typeset, Meade and Penny handled Lumley’s chapter themselves, hammering out the piece on the “automatic

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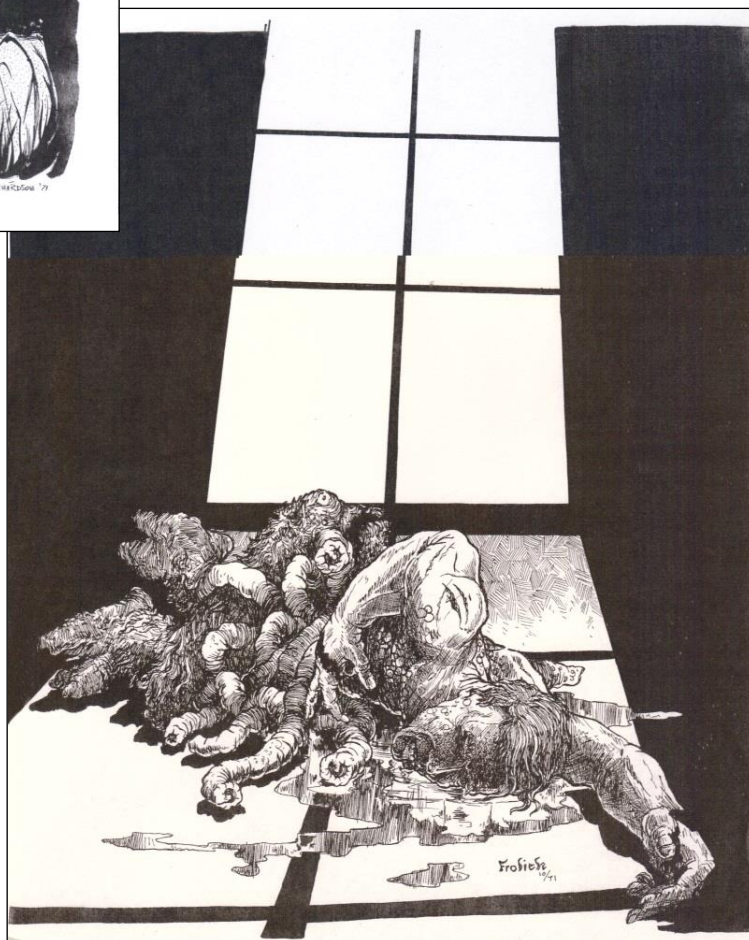


Here and on the next page are some of the drawings the Friersons ran as part of *HPL*'s central portfolio. There were several interpretations of great scenes and great monsters – here are two from “The Dunwich Horror”: “big brother” by John Adkins Richardson, above, and below, Wilbur Whateley on the library floor by Dany Frolich. Across, Herb Arnold’s portrait of “Pickman’s Model”, the drawing which first caught Meade’s attention, and a chubby Cthulhu.

Given such an abundance of splendid art, it’s easy to forget that *HPL* was primarily a *written* tribute to H. P. Lovecraft – with contents that has never been equaled. Meade wrote in *The Shadow over Woodvale* of his certainty that “*HPL* will be topped in quality and quantity in the future. Sic transit gloria fanzines ...” but ...

typewriter” in Meade’s law office. So much material came in that Frierson swore he could publish a zine twice the size of the one he did.

Of course, with such quality contributors, *HPL* deserved better reproduction than mimeography. Though he contemplated a cheaper offset process, Meade finally opted, nervously, for full-scale printing – and though he gives no final cost in *The Shadow over Woodvale*, he makes guesstimation easy. *HPL* sold for \$3 per – copies are now \$125-\$150 on eBay! – and 1000 were printed. Crammed to the gulleons with artwork, articles, stories, poems – the most ambitious fanzine ever to come out of the South was born.



well, just gaze upon these contributors and their contributions ...

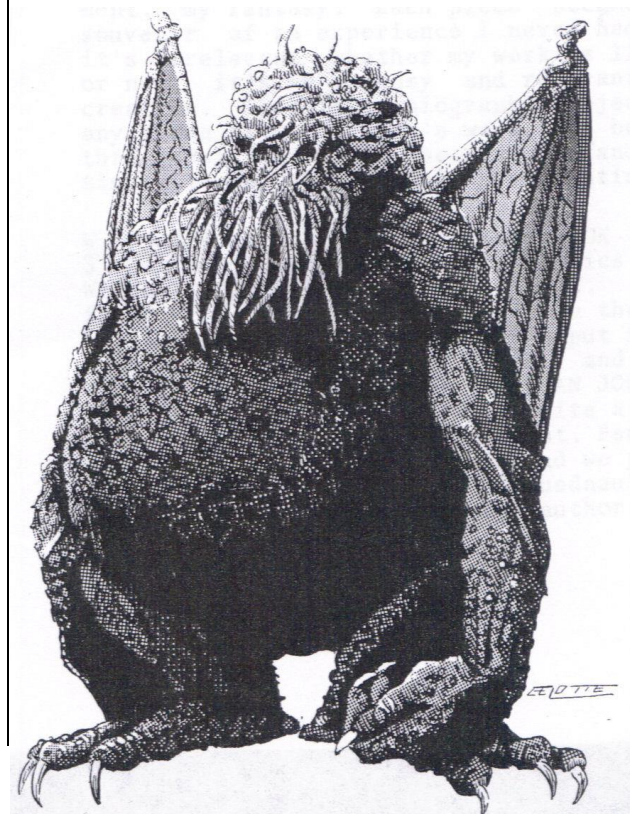
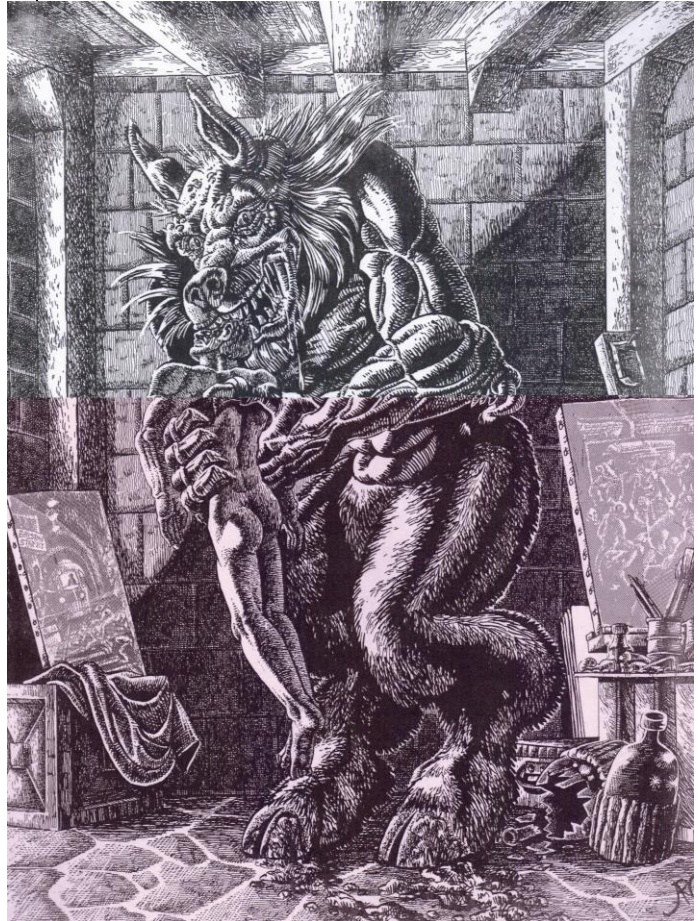
Lovecraftian fiction by Ramsey Campbell (still signing his work *J. Ramsey Campbell*), Darrell Schweitzer, Al Attanasio, Brian Lumley (the chapter from *Burrowers Beneath* mentioned before, and absolutely ace work) and Manly Wade Wellman, among *many* others ... Critical studies by Robert Bloch, Colin Wilson, George Wetzel (who also contributed a story) and New Orleans' Don Walsh (whose later "Rings of the Papaloi" brought Lovecraftian fiction to Louisiana, proving his point that localized settings made for uniquely powerful eldritch horror) ... Poetry by L. Sprague deCamp and Ralph Wollstonecraft Hedge – Meade himself, penning verse rather ill-suited to the Harvard lit'ry magazine. E. Hoffman Price proffered Lovecraft's horoscope and personal reminiscences of his friend. William Scott Home discussed HPL's influence on the genre. J. Vernon Shea talked of Lovecraft on film – years, alas, before the mind-destroying minor masterpiece *The Re-Animator*. Stuart Schiff brought notes on collecting memorabilia of the author to the table, and a far-reaching, deep-sounding interview with Frank Belknap Long (shown with his Lovecraftian creation, Chaugnar Faugn, on the page that follows). There is *so much here*, it's both breathtaking and intimidating – Meade might have believed that *HPL* would someday be surpassed, but that someday has yet to come.

As Frierson said, he and Penny had much more material than they could fit into *HPL*. Their *HPL Supplement* – mimeo'd and without art – ran in SFPA, unlike the original volume; it goes for \$40 through Amazon nowadays.

er er

Reaction to *HPL*? Can't you imagine? Absolute awe.

Joe Moudry, who is working on his own article on *HPL*, provides the following info: *Since it sold out in six months, the zine was a resounding success (and financial disaster, common for Meade, unfortunately). The article that I'm*





working on gives a few highlights on it success.

***HPL** first printing's official publication date, 1,000 copies: 1972.03.28*

Declared Out of Print: 1972.09.10.

*A second printing of 500 copies was also published with points of distinction given on the first page of the **HPL Supplement #1**.*

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My friendship with Meade took off from that first meeting. Many was the night I spent on that family room couch. Many were the evenings when Meade would lead me forth for a night of corrupting carousing in the fleshpots of

Bumminham. He won Southern fandom's Rebel Award at the first Rivercon in 1975 – it was also a DeepSouthCon – taking by then to wearing a studded denim jacket emblazoned with the Southern Fandom Confederation coat of arms. Many's the con corridor we crawled together. Penny, no slouch in fandom, achieved the zenith of science fiction respectability – chairing a fine DSC and the finest con I've ever attended, for so many reasons, Confederation.

Meade had his problems as time went on. The law can be a tough mistress, even for a genius who graduated high in his class from UVA. But he remained a fast and generous friend, giving me a strong recommendation when I applied to law school and cheering me on through the next very tough and very lonely four years.

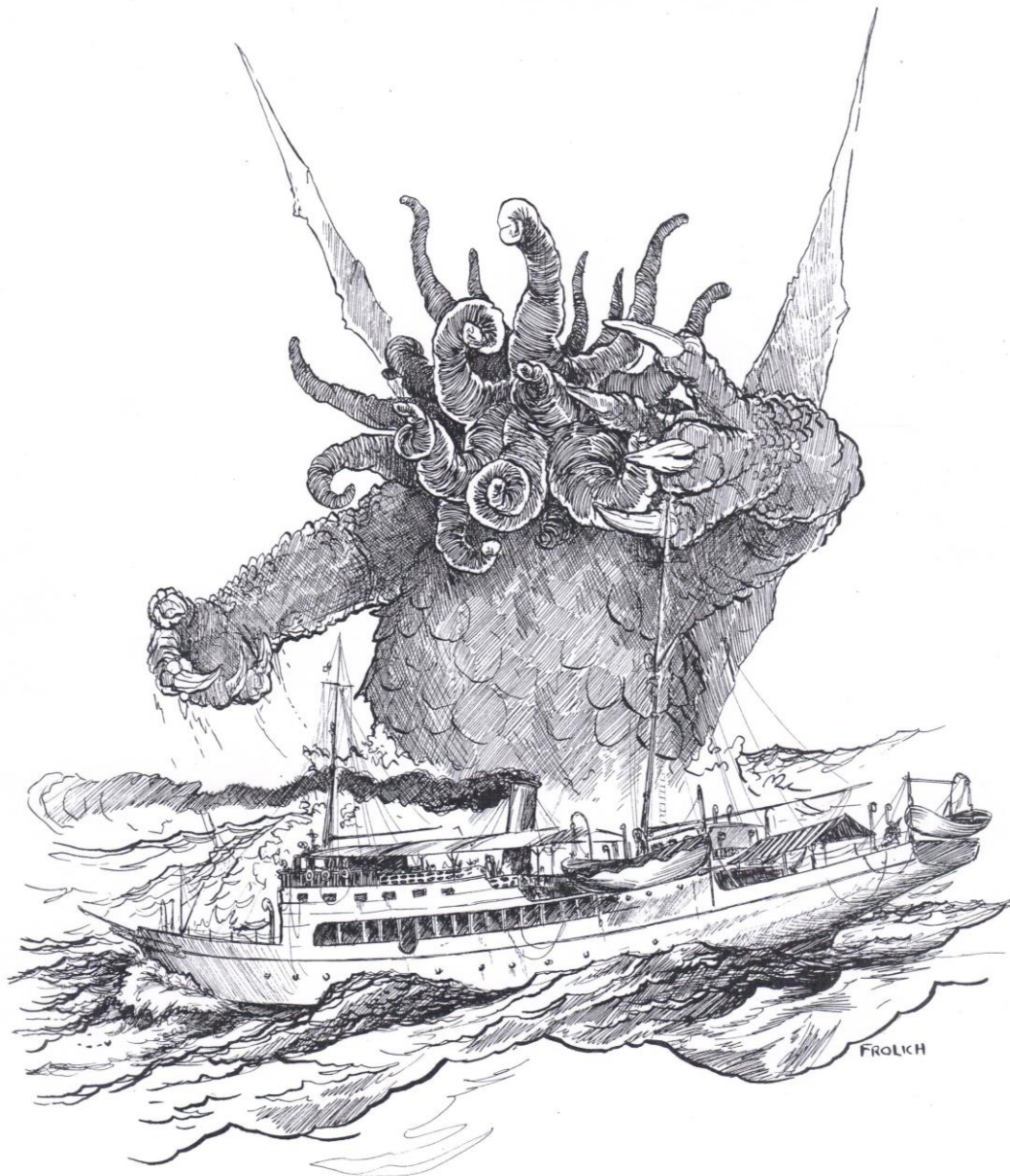
Meade segued into genealogy as time went on and his fanac faded to attending the occasional convention. Cancer took him in September, 2001. Penny has gafiated.

I was asked, the year after Meade died, to host a wake for him at the DeepSouthCon. We gathered, his friends – and they were without number – but none of us felt like telling fun stories or anecdotes

about our friend, even though there were plenty to be told. Losing him hurt too much. Myself, I think I would have given a year of my life to have him walk in the door one last time. I still feel that way.

er er

Dany Frolich's "Cthulhu Rising".



#6 Well

That

Was

Fun! 9*

Joseph T. Major

The Secret Service holds much that is kept secret even from very senior officers in the organisation. Only M. and his Chief of Staff know absolutely everything there is to know. The latter is responsible for keeping the Top Secret record known as The War Book so that, in the event of the death of both of them, the whole story, apart from what is available to individual Sections and Stations, would be available to their successors.

The procedures of the Secret Service have grown and expanded since the early days. Had an intruder, somehow aware of all the methods and means, managed to enter the offices armed, and shoot dead the current M., The War Book contained procedures to deal with the matter. On a rainy November morning, a series of events began which would lead the Chief of Staff to prepare a new section of The War Book.

Number forty-four Kensington Cloisters was a dull Victorian mansion in grimy red brick. It had been chosen for its purpose because it had once been the headquarters of the Empire League for Noise Abatement, and its entrance still bore the brass plate of this long-defunct organisation, the empty shell of which had been purchased by the Secret Service through the Commonwealth Relations Office. It also had a spacious old-fashioned basement, re-equipped as detention cells, and a rear exit into a quiet mews.

There were people in the building who dealt with the letters. Those written in pencil or multicoloured inks, and those enclosing a photograph, remained unanswered. Those which threatened or were litigious were referred to the Special Branch. The solid, serious ones were passed, with a comment from the best graphologist in the business, to the Liaison Section at Headquarters for "further action". Parcels went automatically, and fast, to the Bomb Disposal Squad at Knightsbridge Barracks. The eye of the needle was narrow. On the whole it discriminated appropriately. It was an expensive setup, but it is the first duty of a secret service to remain not only secret but secure.

The latest product of this system now lay upon M's desk. It was addressed to him by name, but as "Chairman, Universal Export", at the address of Headquarters. The envelope was striking; it was coloured a light purple, while the writing on it was in a darker shade of that colour.

The contents of the letter had been enclosed in a glassine envelope. They were perfectly ordinary. The envelope had contained nothing but a clipping from *The Times*, the obituary that M. had written for James Bond after his disappearance in Japan last year.

The writing on the clipping was in the same hand as the address on the envelope, in ink of the same colour. It said: 'Well, that was fun! Now who's for Chinese? J.'

M. said, "What were the deliverymen told?"

"Nothing. They were hired through what appeared to be a reputable firm, for a 'round game,' a publicity stunt from the newspapers apparently," the Chief of Staff said.

"And they delivered to this address a peculiar container."

"It resembles the sort of container used by Chinese restaurants in the States for take-away food. You see them in the cinema all the time. This one was large enough to contain a man."

"007," M. said.

"Yes. Asleep — drugged — and covered in ..." The Chief of Staff paused, embarrassed to tell what he would be saying. After a moment he forced himself to go on. "Covered in sweet-and-sour sauce." . . .

"A Room with a View"

The doctor said that Bond had fully recovered. The intricacies of this flight were more to give him some final time for reflexion, thoughts in between Jamaica and London, time to ponder his future. Was he getting past it? The service life of an agent of the Double-O section was short, though most ended it by dying.

He had died, in a sense, over and again. The wounds from Scaramanga had been a warning. Scaramanga, and that uncouth woman Rosa Klebb, and so on all the way back to Le Chiffre, with his grotesque methods. And to what had happened at Blofeld's hands.

Before he could continue this line of thought he realised that someone had blundered. He was booked into economy class with all its horrors. Unspeakable food, nothing to drink, and the pains of being thrust into accommodation more suitable to prisoners being taken to Siberia. He did not even have a window seat, or an aisle one.

The man with the window seat was asleep, a newspaper over his face, and Bond could see there was no hope of an exchange. The person with the aisle seat might be more cooperative. Thus far he had not made an appearance, and Bond's hopes grew.

He turned his attention to the wretched publication the airline had devised for the purported enjoyment of its flyers. A photograph of a dark-haired young woman in strange attire, a

top hat and tails, but fishnet stockings and high heels, as though she could not decide between being a male-impersonator and a streetwalker, filled the cover. He began to read when a harsh American voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Look, puddin'! It's our old friend!"

The vapid face and plaited fair hair of the woman in the aisle contrasted with the lissome, powerful body. Unwillingly, Bond turned away from her to look at his other seatmate, who took the corner of the paper in one gloved hand and lifted it. The scarred face could not twist any further in a smile, but it assumed that look. "Don't touch me, old boy!" he said as Bond reached for the paper. Then, after a nervous moment, he added, "I don't know where you've been."

They remained like that for a moment. The Joker then said, "I hope you don't mind not making an uproar. It would be so ungrateful, after all that I've done for you. I don't want to kill you! What would I do without you?"



Bond strove to review the circumstances calmly. The Joker did not normally look like that. No-one would look closely at the too-even pancake makeup that covered the unnatural whiteness of his skin, they would be horrified by the dreadful scars around his perpetually drawn-up mouth. So this was how he travelled about the country!

His woman took the other seat, and began chewing gum. Another of those offensive and juvenile habits that even adults in America affected. After all this, to be eliminated and by those two! That poison the man had with its delayed action, might already be circulating in his veins, ready to turn him into a tetanus-ravaged horror.

The last time Bond had felt that way had been when the tarantula had been crawling over him. No matter, as the biologist from Q Branch had told him afterwards, that its bite would not have caused more than a small sore, it had been the sheer terror of being attacked so covertly and insidiously.

The flight seemed to last forever. All too soon, though, the airplane touched down on the tarmac. They would all have to change here, as if they were on some local train service. There, Bond would have to decide where and when to denounce them.

Or should he? He had no mission to bring the Joker to the haphazard attentions of the American justice system. Beyond that, to call for his arrest would mean that Bond would be exposed. That was not what M. had sent him to Jamaica for.

The man was so whimsical! After the first time they had brushed up against each other, Bond had read a report sent over by the American FBI. They had begun a new programme of interviewing such killers with an intent of determining their thoughts.

The interviewer, an agent named Starling, had given up in disgust and failure. The Joker had ridiculed and mocked her, given answers that were often confusing and bewildering. After he had described how funny she would look when strangled, she had abruptly terminated the interview. She had been frustrated from the beginning when he had refused to give his name.

M. had said, "The Americans put an almost mystic reliance on the power of their mental experts." This was always not the case. In the days after Bond's return to the offices of the Secret Service, Sir James Molony had put forward mighty efforts to clear Bond of the clouds that hazed his mind.

The Joker must have interrogated him as well, under his own drugs. How else would he have known where to deliver Bond, in the grotesque and audacious fashion that he had done? There seemed to be no memories of that, which worried them all the more.

Perhaps it was time to enter the bondage that Mary had offered! She knew about what had happened to Tracy, what Vesper had been and done. Was she willing to risk her own life?

It had been almost a sexual pleasure to have killed Blofeld, in the grotesque Castle of Death in Japan. Though Blofeld had been almost as comic as the Joker himself, his grotesqueries and his erratic nature merely expressed in a different fashion.

Bond fumbled over the woman's knees, took down his travelling case, and headed for the exit. There would be a man from the CIA there to deal with any local matters. Behind him there came a mocking, "If you've gotta go, go with a smile!"

"This government thing and the LexCorp people."

The guard at the exit was distinctly annoyed. Having to let people pass without a proper interrogation and search seemed anathema to his blighted soul. The CIA officer, a Mr Stetson, also seemed annoyed. "LexCorp?" he said, annoyed in a different fashion. "Them?"

Bond turned and looked over his shoulder. The man in the long overcoat with the hat pulled down over his roughly made-up face, and the blonde woman, were being led into a special lounge of the airport. So the Joker had corporate ties ...



**“We THREE
KONGS of
Skull Island
Are ...”**



Guy Lillian



My parents and I were in a movie theatre in Birmingham, Alabama. Coming attractions came on. 4 years old, I jumped from my seat and hid my face against my mother.

“Don’t be scared!” said my dad. “That’s just *King Kong*!”

I looked up to the screen to see a giant gorilla leap to a stage. Again I hid. I peeked again to see the same beast hanging onto the side of a building waving his arm defiantly at the street below. Another hide, another peek: a long-necked dinosaur in a deep jungle. “Don’t be scared”? Was GHL Jr. out of his *gourd*?



(The trailer for the second coming attraction showed a weird-looking black guy crouching in sugar cane. “Now *that* will be scary!” Dad said, referring to *I Walked with a Zombie*!)

So I remember, you see, the first time I encountered *King Kong*. Notice that I don’t say which *King Kong* I’m talking about. My article’s title notwithstanding, we all know: there is only one.

Justin Winston and I once watched the 1933 Merian Cooper *King Kong* at his house. We couldn’t help but note the stilted dialog in the all-human scenes, but also how preternaturally hot Fay Wray was.

“But when they go into that jungle,” Justin observed, “there’s never been *anything* like it. Before or since.” No kidding. *King Kong* ’33 had resonance – lasting quality. The revolutionary stop-motion effects were only the start. The movie made you care about Kong, cheer him in

his incredible fight with the T-rex, weep – if you’re any kind of a softie – when he falls from the Empire State Building. In fact, I think it helped make the big building at 33rd Street and 5th Avenue famous. It *was* less than two years old at the time!

Early publicity for the 1976 version of *King Kong* featured a giant mechanical Kong that looked about as realistic as a forty-foot wind-up toy, which is what it was. (The thing was so phony the producers allowed it to show on screen for no more than a second or two.) The film had a cynical, craven plot, employed cretinous and ridiculously obvious sexual imagery, and insulted everyone and everything connected with *King Kong* – from its fans to its artists. Perhaps the most repulsive thing about the ’76 Kong was the publicity. As it approached release, armies of flacks exploded all over the media, claiming this *Kong* was not only the equal of the ’33 original, but its better.

Dino de Laurentiis, its producer, appeared on Tom Snyder, promising when braced to remove the fundamental lie of “Original” from the movie poster. He never did, of course. My personal despair over the flick hit bottom when *Time* put it on its cover and when Forrest J Ackerman wrote it up for *Famous Monsters of Filmland* – but fortunately, my faith was restored. Both *Time* and Forry denounced de Laurentiis’s ego trip as all but insulting to Merian Cooper’s work of art.

(The nonsense hasn’t ended. A fat kid on YouTube who reviews all the Kong films claims ’76 is the greatest movie ever made. Yeah. Right. Hope they paid his way through college.)

The hacks and flacks notwithstanding, the movie must stand on its own. And it can’t. It has to rely on dirty jokes and was simply – the best word for it – crass.

I expected no less from a Lorenzo Semple, Jr. script. John Guidry swears that Semple was a righteously well-informed movie critic, but as a scriptwriter he was probably the most vulgar hack who ever cheapened someone else’s great characters. His demolition of Batman in the TV show was the least of it. His script for *KK* was

chockablock with crude imagery and juvenile jokes, his treatment of the girl – Jessica Lange as Dwan, no Ann Darrow here – was grotesque ... well, specifics.

Amateur critics had long opined that Kong was a metaphor for black rage and black sexuality. A bit of a stretch, but it was one of the obsessions of the '70s era, and such allusions can, with a little imagination, indeed be found in the Cooper film. Semple had no faith in subtle allusions. He believed in graphic crudity. So he had a well-built black dancer do a crotch-rubbing bump-&-grind over Jessica Lange's stoned, drooling Dwan, and made sure we got the message by showing the wall's blonde-hued vaginal-shaped gate-lock so sloooooooooowly penetrated by a crossbar glistening black with oily lubricant ... Get it? Get it? I knew you would.

The climax (hahaha) of the film takes place on the World Trade Center, the third-worst insult those poor buildings ever had to endure. (Ouch – I bet I shouldn't have said that.) There we see Jeff Bridges' manic celebrations when Kong kills soldiers on his way to the top, and there we see the ape's ever-so-effing noble sacrifice as he pushes Dwan out of the way of the bullets coming his way. How strong. How noble. At least the gorilla got the hell out of the movie, ending his disgrace ... until the sequel. Which I won't discuss – except to say that I hated it much less than its immediate predecessor. It was stupid, but it wasn't *crude* and stupid.

I mentioned Justin Winston earlier. He didn't see the end of the 1976 version of *King Kong*. He walked out when Kong fought the rubber snake.

Many years later, Peter Jackson entered the picture. He was fresh from one of the pivotal acts in the history of cinema, weighed down with Oscars – 17 in all for the three installments of *The Lord of the Rings* – and anxious to do homage as he knew only he could. And so we got *King Kong* 2005, overlong, overambitious, and for me, anyway, an overwhelming accomplishment.

KK '05 tries to make Kong, as a character, comprehensible – and it mostly succeeds. Thanks to the sensitive script, to the technology of motion

capture and to the king of such performers, Andy Serkis, Peter Jackson's *King Kong* tells us more about the ape than any of the other films and humanizes him to a degree that is almost too sad to watch. It's why Rosy hates the movie – and I love it.

Oh, the flick has flaws – excess, excess: whereas Cooper knew that less is more, Jackson had to have more and more and more. Dinosaurs threaten one by one in the '33 *Kong*; 72 years later a whole huge herd of them stampedes. Cooper's Kong fights a blood-curdling battle with a young T-Rex; Jackson's successor has to go him two better, and fight three. The spider scene was cut from the original film – although Ray Harryhausen claimed he saw it once in the Philippines – so now it must be restored, a thousand times grosser. Tommy guns must be fired willy-nilly, yet never graze a good guy – just knock giant bugs off his head. More and more – it's as if Jackson loved the story and exulted so much in what he and WETA and his brilliant actor could do with it that he *just couldn't stop* ... And of course, he should have. At 2/3 of the length and with 2/3 of the FX, *Kong* 2005 could have been a legitimate contender.

Well, it's still not bad. In fact, in some ways, it's Great. If you let yourself feel for Kong, you'll leave Peter Jackson's movie with a broken heart.

Like his '33 predecessor, Kong lives in a world of constant danger, constant challenge. Every day is another struggle, another battle with prehistoric life. And he must carry the weight of incessant peril as he bears the agony of solitude – he is the last of his kind. That skeleton behind him on his mountain perch is probably his mother's.

But Jackson goes further in his insight into Kong. He is an able warrior. The final showdown atop the Empire State Building is a real battle; whereas his 1933 progenitor was pitifully baffled by the flying monsters cutting him apart, this Kong takes out half the airplane squadron before they bring him down. And why is he there? Why does he claim the highest point – first of Skull Island, then of Manhattan – as his own? It's to see the sunrise. It's to appreciate beauty. Kong's idea of beauty goes beyond Ann Darrow's perfect chops and

goldilocks – he is a *feeling being*. And that puts him where the planes have a clear shot. Nature is dangerous. Beauty kills the beast.

There have been lots of other Kongs, imitations, wannabes ... and some have been really ripe. Take, for instance, *Queen Kong* – so bad its stars are grateful that it's never been theatrically released. (The hero is brilliantly named: Ray Faye.) The reason the film was never brought to a genuine silver screen can be laid at Dino de Laurentiis' feet – he sued, thinking it might interfere with his 1976 classic. If only it had. I've never seen the movie, but its execrable novelization is a frequent contender at DeepSouthCon's Worst SF Novel contest. Inevitably, when typical sequences are read along, the reader quotes one of the movie's many songs.

Queen Kong, Queen Kong Queen Kong
is the chick with all the hair

Queen Kong comes
from I don't know
where

Kong Kong Kong
Kong Kong Kong
Queen Queen Queen
Queen Queen, Queen
Kong She's a Queenie
who ain't weenie
She's a Queenie
Queenie Queenie for
my weenie

When I'm feeling
mighty spunky
I want to do it with
my hunky monkey
Queenie Queenie

Queenie Queenie, Queen Kong Kong Kong
Kong Kong, Queen Kong

I can't agree with the tune's romantic sentiment. A buh-lon-duh native girl depicted in one of the stills from the movie resonates in my thoughts far more than does the ape. By the way, a Queen Kong – not this one – is a popular float in the Bacchus Mardi Gras parade. Catch it, and some beads, sometime. *Laissez les bons temps roulez!*

King Kong versus Godzilla is not the story of a lawsuit but an intensely ridiculous Japanese film bringing the two great behemoths together for a

battle royal. There was a rumor circulating when the movie was released that there were two versions – one, aimed at western audiences, where Kong was victorious, the other, for consumption on the home islands, where the great green Godzilla emerged triumphant. I don't know. All I know is that, to my delight, I found the show cheerfully silly, in many ways worth seeing. Who could resist Japanese actors in blackface, terrible miniatures and the ridiculous Kong costume?

This flick is clearly a romp, but *King Kong vs. Godzilla* wasn't allowed to be itself. It *had* to have a Hollywood premiere, Forry Ackerman *had* to take Willis O'Brien's widow to see it, and we *had* to hear the poor lady's dismay at the sorry treatment her husband's greatest work received at the hands of the Japanese. Too bad. The movie is lousy, but it manages to be *fun* lousy.

Then there's *The Mighty Gorga*. It is not fun lousy. It's just lousy.

This movie is so wretched it forced Cassandra Peterson, a.k.a. Elvira Mistress of the Dark, to drop out of character when she showed it on TV. "Didn't I *tell* you," she shrieked, "that this movie was *unbelievable?!'*" The scene with the plastic tyrannosaur in on YouTube. Gaze. You will be forever changed.



That's about the nadir when it comes to *King Kong* ripoffs, although there was a softcore porn *Kong* that showed, like a herpes sore, on HBO. It ended with the giant ape dry-humping the Statue of Liberty. It wasn't the first time I've advocated the death penalty for filmmakers, but it was possibly the most sincere.

You know ... one can imagine the real Kong, Merian C. Cooper's, rolling his eyes at the treatment he received in 1976 and giving a thumbs-up to Peter Jackson for trying so hard in 2005. But one wonders ... how would he react to *these* movies. Hmm ...

WHAT THE HELL???



There is no
king but
King Kong.
Accept no
substitutes.



Ill-Winds Still Blow

Taral Wayne

Target Market

In response to the tragic shooting at Newton a while ago, the National Rifle Association has suggested that the patient be cured by a larger dose of the same poison. The NRA calls for armed police officers to be placed in every educational facility in the land. “The only thing that stops a bad guy with a gun, is a good guy with a gun.”

Do you think armed guards at school will be enough? Perhaps we should lock students into their classrooms as well? We could further guard their safety by issuing uniforms, so that unauthorized individuals could be more easily spotted, and number the students as well. Names just encourage them to step out of line. And ... do children really need to go home at night?

Just a few humble suggestions in an effort to promote freedom and liberty in the most free country on Earth.

After all, the main thing is that students will have the freedom to carry a gun, after they graduate.

And besides ... your school-age boy or girl will look so adorable in their Disney “child-approved, personal, school ballistic-armour!”

Remedia Education

People have said that that animated films are being written for adults these days, as though this were a problem in need of immediate repair. But who said animated films were just for kids? In all seriousness, I think animated movies are fine they way they are, and should *not* be written down for a younger audience. Now and then one may go a little *too* far over the heads of small fry –

assuming you would take your kids to see *Antz*, *Porco Rosso* or *The Triplets of Belleville*, films not intended for children – but most have enough pratfalls and farts to keep the kiddies pleased even while you chuckle over the allusions to sex and references to popular culture.

I also think that perhaps we underestimate the kiddies. How do we know they don’t understand every bit as much as we do? Do we underestimate their grasp ... or overvalue ours? Probably the later. Classic animation in the past was aimed at a mixed theatre audience, and contained humour for kids of all ages – 8 to 80. Yet today Bugs Bunny is almost exclusively presented on TV as fare for children! Clearly, since kids are unlikely to be any smarter than they were, adults have grown *dumber* with time.

A different explanation, more flattering to our egos, is that we have merely committed a tautology. We show cartoons to kids, kids do not know as much as adults, therefore cartoons should be made for kids at a below adult level of understanding. People who reason this way may have trouble following modern cartoons like *The Venture Brothers* or *Duckman*.

When I was a kid, I appreciated material that was more “adult” than my age allowed for. How else was I to learn anything? School? School never taught me what evil lurked in the hearts of men, that ghosts wore sheets, why Eisenhower fired MacArthur, that the old South voted Democrat, why Khrushchev banged his shoe at the U.N. or that Yiddish words were funny. Humour “above” my age taught me all that. I learned all I knew

from comic books, comic strips and animated cartoons.

So give yourself a break. Sit down with your kids and watch *Samaria Jack* ... you may learn something.

Torn Genes

There was an interesting story in the CBC's science section about the loss of a segment of our genome. If the story is true, we have reason to be more modest. The missing segment is a sort of cut-off switch that keeps the brain from growing too big. In most mammals, this makes sense – you would no more need a *brain* that was twice as big as normal as you would need a *liver* that was twice as big. A cow or a pig or a monkey is about as smart as it needs to be. But imagine a primate that, due to an unknown cause, suffered gene damage, and passed on to its descendants a *defective* switch. The next generation's brain grows a little bigger, so it is a little brighter and develops a competitive advantage in its environment, favouring the growth of an even *larger* brain in the following generation ... leading many millennia down the road to H. Soporific. But it wouldn't change the rather humbling fact that the braininess we're so proud of might be due to a mere birth defect in the long ago and far away.

Who's On First?

Why is it that whenever any news appears that involves human origins, or the age of the Earth, the White Trash, Tea Baggers and Evangelist zealots pop out of the woodwork and turn it into an free-for-all argument about Creationism?

Well, nuts to that! I'm not taking the bait! I'm going to talk about the Clovis culture and a different sort of Creationism instead.

The idea that the Clovis people were the earliest in the New World has been under steady attack by cutting-edge anthropologists for a long time. The Clovis culture was named after a site in Alaska, and was long thought to be the oldest evidence of Man in the New World. Clovis sites were subsequently found at many other locations in

North America – none of them dating earlier than about 11 to 12,000 BC. The latest thinking suggests, however, that remains found in several Central and South America sites are as much as 38,000 years old – *far* older than the Clovis spear points found in Alaska. These discoveries have been dismissed consistently for a couple of decades by conventional archeologists, who are fixated on the migration of humans from Asia to North America during a certain window between certain ice ages, and have been resistant to any alternative. Radical new thinking suggests that those supposed ice-free corridors over the Rockies may not have existed, and that the interior of the continent may have been settled late.

Earlier migrants may, in fact, have used boats to follow the coast of the Americas as far south as Chile before penetrating the Coastal Ranges and Rockies and spreading out over the Great Plains. We know primitive leather boats were made by very early people. Such craft needn't have been very seaworthy, as the coast was relatively free of ice, and so may have been much of the coast of the Bering land bridge. To follow the coast may have taken little more daring or effort than paddling from one day-harbor to the next. Following the entire coast could conceivably have taken Neolithic explorers as little as a few hundred years, no matter how cautious their advance.

More recently, there have also been finds in *Alaska* – where, supposedly, the earliest North American pioneers settled – of an even earlier migration that appears to belong to an ethnic group distinctly different from today's First Nations. These people more closely resemble the Ainu in Northern Japan than the Mongolian tribes which, we are conventionally taught, are the ancestors of today's Indians and Inuit. One reconstruction of a skull bore an amusing resemblance to the actor Patrick Stewart, and was facetiously dubbed "Picard Man." What if "native" Americans are also Johnny-come-latelies?

Naturally, First Nations legal spokesmen have vigorously resisted the idea, and have even tried to suppress study of the remains in courts of law.

According to their brief, the ice-age remains are members of the existing band in residence of the area, and are thus sacred. Scientific study would be sacrilegious, and a court order was sought to thrust the inconvenient evidence back into the ground for time and the elements to destroy.

After years of long, drawn-out debate, the courts decided otherwise, and a compromise was reached in which the skull and other bones would be studied first – then disposed of with the appropriate religious mummery afterward. Victory alike, I suppose, for possession of the relics and for the advancement of our understanding of human origins. Yet I can't help feel that this was still a surrender to superstition.

For one thing, who seriously believes that the current native band living on the western coast of Alaska has been sitting there for longer than 12,000 years? When we have records of Indian movements at all, we typically find them in constant flux, with bands as important as the Iroquois, Dakota and Apache wandering thousands of miles *within historic memory*. The Navaho believe they were released into the "Upper World," this world, by a god, and were the first people. Yet, irritated Pueblo Indians tell how the Navaho only arrived a few hundred years ago. This was only slightly before the Spanish turned up, bringing down property values even further.

Native Americans may believe they have always been in the New World, but it is a *religious* belief, based on tradition rather than investigation or evidence. As such, it isn't any more worthy of serious consideration than the Christian tradition that we all spring from the loins of Adam, who was expelled from a lost garden somewhere in the Middle East, around 4006 BC. In fact, Indian beliefs tend to be very similar. The corn god impregnated a ginko, or we crawled into this world from under a rock, or the thunder god made us from clay. Why must we "respect" any of this?

Yet, according to lawyers representing the First Nations, we must! We are supposed to debate these ideas in law courts, as though they were reality, and as though they had any bearing on the study and display of archeological remains. When

Science must toss dice in a courtroom over old bones, we run the danger that the evidence will be buried in the ground – along with the taboo subject of Who Was Here First – to be washed away by a balm of religiously inspired forgetfulness. I suppose it's only fair, though – if the courts are willing to discuss cases involving the teaching of Creationism in schools, then why not protect the myths of First Nations from genuine inquiry as well?

Will it always be so, I wonder? Will it make no difference how much time goes by? Will we still be unable to separate myth from reality in the real Captain Picard's time? Wait ... I believe I'm demonstrating a little difficulty telling myth and reality apart, myself.

Saving Time

"What did I do with 2012 C.E.? Like all good girls and boys ... I wasted every last second!" – a correspondent.

People talk about saving time, but I haven't heard yet about anyone who had a handy stockpile of minutes left over at the end of a year, or even an extra second at the end of his life. I wonder if there might be something to be said for a mandatory government time-saving plan? Your employer could withhold five minutes of the working day, and save it toward your retirement. The government might have to *tax* time, though, so as to have the resources to match your weekly contributions. However, think how nice it would be, at the end of your life, if you could put-in for your benefits and live an *extra* five years ... All it would cost is a few minutes a day on the job, that you would never likely miss. Of course, every nation in the developed world would do it, *except* the United States ... where it would be denounced as "socialism."

Cogito Ergo Some

Some science is more provisional than other science, but that's something that scientists know well and must take into account. Yet, in many instances, provisional science is all there is to go on. For example, there are rocks that appear in a certain order from top to bottom, and they have different mineral compositions from one layer to the other. In some layers there are fossils, in some

layers there are other fossils and finally the lowest layers have no fossils at all. One layer of rock shows signs that it had been eroded by heavy rain, and then was buried by new deposits, or there are scratches in the surface indicating glaciers once ground the rock under. The presence of a very primitive shellfish in one strata indicates it is older than another strata that contains more evolved mammals. A layer of volcanic ash from an explosion known, from the state of a weathered cinder cone, to have happened 150,000 years ago means that the rock beneath it is from an older time. Marine clay on top of desert sandstone tells us that the ocean invaded a desert ... or did mountain building turn the sequence upside down? Sometimes the evidence is ambivalent.

But the means of observation and deduction – shaky as any single step in the reasoning may be – a comprehensive body of information is collected which creates a compelling timeline. It's incomplete – every scientist knows that. It can be interpreted different ways – scientists write thousands of papers arguing for one interpretation over others. And the first unequivocal fact that comes along that won't fit into the standard model throws that model into question. The model may stand for a while longer, in the absence of a better explanation, but scientists will have lost faith in it. Sooner or later, a fix must be found to make the model and the inconvenient fact fit together, or the one blows the other out of the water. Either the facts were wrong, or the model. Science progresses by correcting its errors.

Unlike most religions, which admit no “error” except attempts to change them.

Skepticism and constant testing are a part of science – perhaps its most admirable part. Because of its inbuilt process of revision, Science is always the best explanation. Not the *final* one... but the *best*.

This Year's Model

I watched *Cars 2* a while ago. It was *dreadful* – nothing more than a multi-million-dollar cartoon for Tow Mater (voiced by Larry the Cable Ham) to show that a dumb-ass, self-absorbed, redneck pick-up truck can be a hero too. Poor old Lightning McQueen ... even as a straight man he

was left in his sidekick's dust, made to look dull and uninteresting compared to a rusted-out half-wit. The other characters from Radiator Springs and the first movie were treated as nothing but walk-ons. Here's the funny Italian sports car, say hello to the love interest, wave at the shy fire engine as we go by, toot your horn to hippie van. Where the first movie performed a small miracle by making cars seem like such real people in a living world, so that you forget about the wheels and fenders, *Cars 2* started with absolutely perfect renderings of Great Cities of the World and made them seem like lifeless video games. For all the motion, the colour and the sound, everything was strangely flat and static. Cityscapes in London and Rome reminded me of those prints of small Mediterranean towns that hung in your grandmother's kitchen. Scenes in Tokyo reminded me *exactly* of the disposable packaging for the newest Japanese junk food craze.

The spy antics that fed the plot were predictable formula from one end to the other, made humdrum by familiarity. Nor were there many moments when Larry the Cured Ham seemed in the least funny. “Gosharooty! I jest backed into something expensive an' broke it. Ev'ryone's a'lookin' at me funny. Must be 'cause I'm so han'some lookin,' *hyuck*.” By making up for Tow Mater's stupidity and awkwardness with hi-tech espionage gizmos, Disney avoids any real storytelling, choosing to pander to the under-12 crowd instead – no doubt hoping to go to the cash register one more time with this property before running out of ways to market it. I think this is the first film I was ashamed to see the Pixar name on.

Anyway... what was wrong with the AMC Pacer? I thought they were cute, even ahead of their time.

Oh, and Disney Pixar has decided the well wasn't dry, after all. They've released a sort-of-sequel. Having mined out the possibilities of cars with funny faces who talk, *Planes* is about –you guessed it – *airplanes* with faces who talk. They might have learned something from the artistic failure *Cars 2*, however, because they have released this flying turkey direct to home video. If you've grown tired of watching re-runs of

Three's Company, you should be able to pick it up in the under-\$5 bin at Walmart's in a few months.

Two Rights Don't Make a Left

After growing weary of hearing about the "Failure of Socialism" in Europe, I'm growing tired now of hearing about the "Failure of Capitalism" – that is, of Western style economics. Just as the Failure of Socialism was an attempt to discredit our government pensions and any kind of humane health care system, the Failure of Capitalism is nothing but an ill-considered effort to pin the blame for recent reverses in the Western world on the wrong villain. To begin with, to call corporations and market speculation "capitalism" is nothing but smoke and mirrors. Corporations are not about the free market – they are about legal exemptions and privileges, subsidies and government contracts, preferential tax rates and laws written especially for businesses that leave the rest of us liable and disadvantaged. As well, it has been a very long time since speculating in the stock markets has had much to do with investing capital in business, and far more in common with compulsive casino gambling.

The real issue here is that there has *never been* perfect capitalism – a pure market economy without restrictions or intervention. Thankfully. In such an economy, the law would have no objection to selling toxic wastes as cosmetic cream, chalk-and-water mixes as baby formula, and inexpensive cars without brakes or mufflers. Let the buyer beware ... and if he cannot fully inform himself of the product and think through its ramifications, then it isn't fraud ... just the more fool he. However, not even in the most extreme cases – America during the Reagan or Bush years, nor the UK under Margaret Thatcher – have modern Western societies been run that way. In fact, we *do* regulate wattages, water purity, air traffic, building standards, air quality, railway gradients, street traffic control, pesticide use, weights and measures and hundreds of other things. So there is no pure "capitalism" anywhere. Capitalism practiced in its purist form would be nothing more than an anarchy without rules of engagement, which would rapidly devolve into rule by naked power and violence. The purpose of government is to avoid anarchy.

Nor has the impetus behind the trend toward corporate economics been traditional conservatism. On the contrary, the change from past practice has been driven by the profoundly *radical*, aristocratic doctrines of Ayn Rand – whose true nature cannot be understood unless seen as rooted in the insecurities and complacency of a spoiled brat from an urban, middle-class Jewish family in Czarist Russia.

In other words, the babblings of Objectivism might as well have come from Mars.

One could probably make a better argument that there *has* been pure communism. Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, for instance. Clearly, actual communism is, and probably always has been, a failure anywhere it's been tried.

We've also seen that the more unfettered versions of "capitalism" – that is, market anarchy – have led to unstable speculation, to a flight from genuine productive industries to insubstantial activities such as marketing, and to following the lowest wages around the globe. How many stages we have left to go through until we achieve a medieval condition where corporate fiefdoms control the loyalties and lives of peasant employees, and wage perpetual armed war, I don't want to even speculate. We're probably closer than we fear.

But the West didn't embrace that sort of madness until the elections of Reagan and Thatcher, when we began our radical right-wing experiment with our economies. The traditional economies of Western Europe and North America had, for most of the 20th century, been "mixed." We had little state ownership, but much state supervision and a degree of state leadership. And it worked! For 50 years, the West was the most prosperous civilization the world had ever seen! We went from the first heavier-than-air flight to a man on the Moon, in a mere 66 years ... less than a single lifetime. But, no sooner did we begin to give tax breaks to billionaires and borrow against the future to finance the expenditures instead, than the economy began to slow, and the middle class to lose ground. Blame Neocons... blame Reaganomics ... blame Ayn Rand. But don't

blame the “Western” economics we *haven’t* been following for more than a generation.

Every Woman Wants One

When I was about six, we lived in a farm house about a half-hour’s drive north of Toronto – in those days it was still the darkest, impenetrable agricultural land, but my folks were employed minding a dog kennel. Down the road a bit was a mink farm. I was taken to visit once, because we did business with the farm. The mink were kept in small cages, stacked several high, row upon row, aisle after aisle. Most of the animals simply looked bored, but others seemed eager to tear my throat out had they been able to work the latches of their cages. Possibly, that idea was only my six-year-old imagination at work, and the teasing suggestion of the farm operator. Mostly likely, had *any* of the mink got out of their death cells, they would have instantly beat it for the woods.

In any case, after you skin a mink, you have a mink corpse left over ... so, what do you do with it? I’m happy to say that, unlike the hapless buffalo – who was hunted for his hide and tongue, and the rest of him left to rot under the Prairie sun – it happens that there is a *need* for mink corpses. We used to buy them for the kennel.

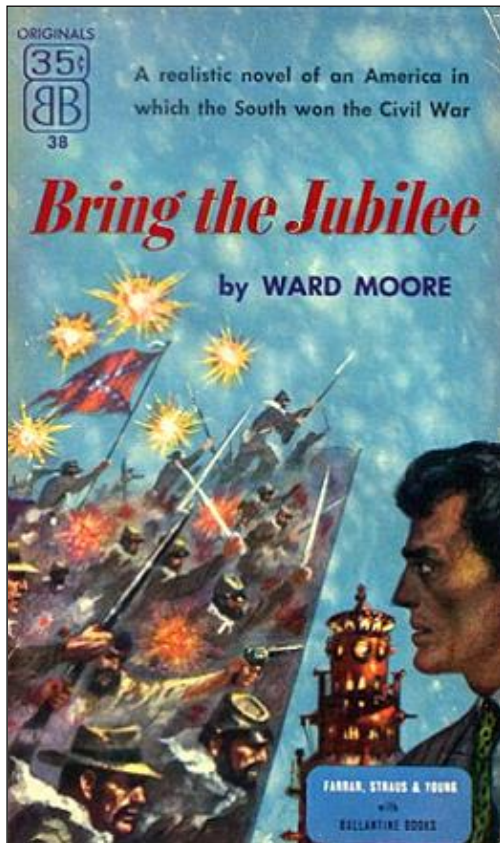
The bodies weren’t sold as whole corpses, of course. They were ground into burger meat and frozen in slabs that weighed about 20 pounds, and were packaged in heavy, waxed cardboard containers. The boxes were cheerfully labeled with a company logo and the trademarked name, “Mink-o-Meat!” I’m not joking. It tasted awful, too. Yes ... as a kid, I *had* to taste it, just as some kids had to taste worms and laundry powder. I was a good kid, though, and asked my Mommy or Daddy first, who said, “*This* I have to see. Go for it!”

It was years before I could eat mink again.

I saw my first dead cat in an empty Mink-o-Meat box. But that, along with how I nearly froze to death the same year, the quicksand pond and the mysterious lost toys in the asparagus patch, are other stories from my golden childhood years that will have to be told some other time.



**STOLEN FROM
FACEBOOK:
SEEN ONE WAY, A
VIPER.
SEEN THE OTHER,
DAFFY DUCK.**



Although I am writing this in the year 1877, I was not born until 1921. Neither the dates nor the tenses are error — let me explain:

— *Bring the Jubilee*, Chapter I

“In any universe where time travel is possible, it will never have been invented.”

— Niven’s Law of Time Travel

Ward Moore had a varied life, born in New York City, wandering about the country, finally settling in California to edit the magazine *Frontier* and to write *Breathe the Air Again* (1942), a novel about the onset of the Great Depression. (Reportedly, he had seen it from the bottom up during a stint as a hobo, and sideways as a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in Milwaukee, until expelled for Trotskyist deviationism.)

Would he have read J. C. Squire’s anthology *If It Had Happened Otherwise* (1931)? Or Oscar Lewis’s *The Lost Years: A Biographical Fantasy* (1951)? While the genre of what did not quite

A PROOF OF NIVEN’S LAW

Commentary by *Joseph T Major* on

BRING THE JUBILEE

by Ward Moore [Joseph Ward Moore]

(1952, 1953)

have the names of contrafactual history, or uchronié, or allohistory, was not quite so prevalent, a few examples had been penned. The Squire book takes off from an essay written by G. M. Trevelyan in 1907, “If: A Jacobite Fantasy” (which has the wrong Pelham brother as Prime Minister, unless that is a point of departure [referred to within the genre as “POD”] before the given point of departure) where the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 is wildly successful. Squire got contributions from well-known British historians and literary figures such as Hilaire Belloc, H. A. L. Fisher, Ronald Knox, Philip Guedalla, G. K. Chesterton, Emil Ludwig, André Maurois, Harold Nicolson — and Winston S. Churchill.

Churchill’s essay has the somewhat confusing title of “If Lee Had Not Won the Battle of Gettysburg”. Such works are nowadays styled “Double-Blind Alternate Histories” or “DBWI”, written from the point of view of the alternate time-line [or “ATL”], putting forth what occurred in our time-line [“OTL”] as the alternate (and usually describing how asinine and implausible the events are, if not launching into an even more off-beat series of consequences). Churchill’s essay does not quite go that far, as he merely recounts the events of his ATL with comments about how we might not be without these advantages.

Another essay in the book is Milton Waldman’s “If Booth Had Missed Lincoln”. This is a sort of DBWI in its own, the essay being put forth as a review of a revisionist work attempting to exculpate Lincoln for his gross mishandling of the

post-war period, after his recovery from an assault by a disgruntled actor.

The Lost Years takes this theme a little further, having Lincoln be badly wounded and disabled, made to hand over the presidential powers until the end of his term. Yet, it turns out, he has his own way of attempting a reconciliation of the sundered states.

Moore had begun writing for those kinds of magazines. *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* for November 1952 had a novelette titled “Bring the Jubilee”. The year after, an expanded version was published by Farrar, Straus and Young in hardcover, and Ballantine Books in paperback.

Probably, none of these writers or works would exist, or if they did would have wildly different careers, in the time-line where Hodgins McCormick Backmaker was born. Born in 1921 in Wappingers Falls, New York, into a farm family, Hodge (as, for the convenience of speech and writing alike he generally is called), finds something missing in his life.

Small wonder, for the Backmaker family is trembling on the verge of poverty, being subsistence farmers piecing out their limited funds by selling crafts to stingy buyers who know they have their sellers at a disadvantage. But then, everyone is poor, except for a limited few, who exist in gated communities and disdain mixing with the commonality.

By dint of personal effort, Hodge is taught to read by his mother, picks up a varied education, and resolves, as so many bright but poor folk before him, to go to the Big City — New York, which has the unimaginably high population of a million. His journey thence is haphazard, over crumbling roads, on foot since no reliable source of mass transportation exists.

In the Wicked Big City, he encounters a number of hazards. Not just the usual bandits, though they do appear, and perform the customary event of depriving him of all his worldly goods. There are recruiters for terrorist groups and foreign militaries. Finally, due to an encounter with a member of the former, he finds a refuge of sorts,

as an unpaid laborer for a cynical but well-read printer.

At this point, the reader unaware of the difference might well wonder what is going on, since it’s 1938 and the Great Depression wasn’t *that* bad. But references to a still-existing French Empire, indeed an Emperors’ War, and the wreck of the Army of the Potomac (during the course of which Hodge’s grandfather lost an arm) might have given the hypothetical mundane reader a clue that all was not as it had been.

Let’s reconstruct the history of the past seventy-five years. The Battle of Gettysburg was a catastrophic Union defeat. The Army of the Potomac was essentially destroyed, its survivors fleeing north. Flushed by this victory, Lee headed south and captured Washington City. Apparently, from references to the “martyred Lincoln”, the President did not survive.

Morally and militarily shattered, the United States surrendered (!). [And you thought that James Thurber’s “If Grant Had Been Drinking at Appomattox” (1930) had been bad (interestingly, Thurber cites “If Booth Had Missed Lincoln,” “If Lee Had Won the Battle of Gettysburg,” and “If Napoleon Had Escaped to America,” all later published in Squire’s book).] The victorious Confederacy proceeds to annex Maryland, Delaware, Missouri, Kansas, and California. (And presumably the New Mexico Territory; Kentucky is not mentioned, except perhaps by default in the comment about the Mason-Dixon Line being the new border.) The surrender terms also include the payment of a large indemnity. Apparently the Union representatives must have been drinking.

This abject surrender is in spite of having cut the Confederacy in two and held most of the coast. Indeed, the Armies of the Tennessee and Cumberland seem to have mutinied, and been put down. This may explain why Grant is not mentioned in the subsequent history, either.

The Union’s economy proceeds to tear itself apart. There is a period of massive inflation, followed by a repudiation of the greenbacks, producing an equally destructive deflation. Industry seems to

have vanished. There is no expenditure on “infrastructure” — no railroads, no road-building even.

Another consequence of the peace seems to be a ban on the formation of an army. And in keeping, there seem to be no police forces or constabulary; whatever commerce might have been is completely strangled by massive banditry.

The principal form of employment is indenture; slavery in all but name. The Backmakers reject it, but the prospect is always there, as it were.

Outside this dolorous third-world backwater, there is also a quite different world. The triumphant Confederacy did abolish slavery, though they brought it back again in all but name. (The position of what was then styled “the Negro” is not much better on either side of the border; there are references to lynchings in the north, in the fashion of the Draft Riots of 1863.) Having done that, though, the Confederacy launched itself into a massive nationwide project of filibustering. That is to say, the military conquest of first Mexico, then the remainder of Central and South America (except, oddly, for Haiti).

This is a continents-spanning country, with fifty million full citizens and four times as many subjects, whether the blacks, the indigenous populations of the Latin American former countries, or the immigrants who came to the Confederacy. The Confederate States of America is a technological and economic world power of the first rank.

Outside these continents, the world has dragged on. In Japan, an attempt to dismiss the Shogunate and restore the power of the Tennō for the establishment of a modernizing government failed. In Europe, the heirs of Napoleon remain in power, while Germany united into a more federal system, the German Union (*Deutscheverein*, I suppose). The Spanish Empire is an ally of the Germans. The fate of Britain is a little sketchier. There is a reference to a South African Republic, which hints at a Boer War more successful for the Boers.

Shortly before Hodge’s birth, there was a conflict in Europe, the Emperors’ War of 1915-1917. It

seems to have been decisive, in that Germany became the predominant power in Europe.

Technology has, of course, developed differently. Heavier-than-air flight is a fantasy, but balloons do traverse the skies. While there are auto-motive vehicles, they are steam-powered, and not surprisingly given the poor state of the roads, break down frequently outside of urban areas. The telegraph is common, but spoken transmission is another fantasy. At least one may be entertained by the tinograph, where moving pictures are projected on a screen, in some fortunate locales accompanied by a recorded audio.

This all is what Hodge finished learning in New York. His refuge, the workshop and home of the cynical, eccentric printer and bookseller Roger Tyss, has the facilities, foremost of them being Tyss himself. It’s worth noting that Moore creates striking characters. Tyss is a learned man, with a highly individuated view of the world. He finds little of worth in his fellow human.

With all those books to hand, Hodge has the potential to fill his mind with the information that was so beyond him on the little farm near Wappingers Falls. When not setting type or distributing publications (or other things, one of which will make his eventual departure easier), he learns about the world around him; educating himself.

The second significant encounter he has is with a young woman who has indentured herself to a well-to-do family. Tirzah Vane is inquiring, but within limits, and seeks to raise herself even as she withholds herself emotionally. Hodge now sees the structure of indenture intimately, along with Tirzah.

The third is with the anomaly. René Enfandin is consul of the Republic of Haiti, the only independent country in the Caribbean. He suffers from the dual stigmata of being African and being a foreigner. Yet he too is learned and inquiring, and he exposes Hodge to not only the world outside the Union, but the plight of the African-American (and no, that term isn’t used here).

Hodge seeks to reconcile all these perspectives. Tyss disdains Tirzah and dislikes Enfandin.

Tirzah isn't interested; she doesn't care for abstract thought or inquiry. Enfandin is inquisitive, but shut out.

As these relationships develop, the American political structure expresses itself. The prewar political parties have vanished. One would expect the Republicans to perish in the aftermath of a war they lost, but it does seem odd that the Democrats, even with the loss of the south, have also eroded away. In their place there are the Whigs and the Populists. The latter are much like the Populists of our time line and indeed many of the same people figure there. The Whigs are the party of the existing order.

When, after an exhausting and expensive campaign, Whig nominee Thomas E. Dewey (evidently the Populists weren't the only people who had parallels) wins the election, Hodge wonders why Tyss was satisfied, since the Populist candidate was closer to his own political beliefs. Tyss lays out the revolutionary view that things must get far worse in order to provoke revolution.

Oh yes, that terrorist group. Moore is indulging in a little irony here, as the organization calling for the overthrow of the old order and the creation of a new one is the Grand Army of the Republic. Perhaps, like the group of that name in our time line, it was founded by veterans of the Union army. This one's purpose is a little more violent.

Everything comes apart then. Tirzah cuts off relations with Hodge. Enfandin is shot during a break-in at his home/consulate and taken back to Haiti to recover. And Tyss begins distributing counterfeit Spanish currency, as part of a plot to trigger a war between the German Union and the Confederacy. This gets Hodge involved in a

shoot-out between a GAR cell and a Confederate group seeking them out.

Hodge begins looking for other appointments. He writes to various institutes of higher education in the Union, even though his credentials are somewhat nebulous. But then, the institutes of higher education are much decayed and somewhat nebulous themselves. His first response, however, is from none, and somewhat cryptic:

ACCEPT NO OFFER TILL OUR
REPRESENTATIVE EXPLAINS
HAGGERSHAVEN.

Shortly thereafter Tyss has a customer. Now, not surprisingly, the status of women is not all that outstanding. Should a young woman, in brass

goggles and a corset with brass stays, bearing a strangely-configured weapon, apply to be the pilot of a balloon with the intent of developing a device heretofore unknown to science, she would be ridiculed at best, certainly ignored, and perhaps even

relegated to the services of an alienist.

However, a mature woman, in a silk jacket and trousers (!), is as odd, if not quite so threatening. She is looking for a Mr. Hodgins M. Backmaker. Who is receiving, if somewhat disheveled. She is also Barbara Haggerwells, the aforementioned representative of Haggershaven. Which she proceeds to explain.

Haggershaven is a community where researchers and intellectual workers live. Not an Owenite or Fourierist socialist utopian community, but just a place where scholars gather to share their work. They do physical labor, but this is to maintain the community, not out of some social ideal. The scholars share their studies, and by sharing, increase the worth of their efforts.



Just the sort of place Hodge dreamed of, and he agrees to go. Which won't mean his immediate approval, since the community votes on new members.

His journey from New York to Haggerhaven, which is near York, Pennsylvania, is attended with observations both historical and social. This was the route which the battered survivors of the Army of the Potomac — including Hodge's own ancestor — took in their dolorous desperate flight from their Confederate conquerors. He notes the deteriorated condition of the railroads, where the unfortunate traveler must make many connections, often poorly coordinated, endure ramshackle transport, and generally suffer conditions worthy of the infamous Ostia canal boat journey described by Horace. At least Hodge doesn't have to be strip-searched by poorly paid federal marshals desirous of ensuring he is not concealing explosives in his shoes.

From the train station in York to Haggerhaven is a walk of ten miles. Which turns out to have its own adventures, particularly when Hodge becomes an unwilling spectator to a brutal robbery and murder. A somewhat antiquated horse carriage has been halted by a gang of local ruffians. The principal passenger is a Spanish diplomat; he and his wife are quickly murdered, their coach plundered. Sensibly, Hodge is in hiding; he finds a young woman who somehow exited the carriage unnoticed also hiding and leads her away. She declines to speak.

Unfortunately for Hodge, the next woman he encounters is not so silent. He finishes his walk to Haggerhaven, checks in — and encounters Barbara Haggerwells, who proceeds to denounce and upbraid him for having had the temerity to bring a whore with him to the community. Hodge's guide has seen this before, he gets the young woman settled in and takes Hodge to see Thomas Haggerwells, the nominal proprietor of the community.

Their ancestor, Herbert Haggerwells, a Confederate officer from North Carolina, had been taken by the locale, and purchased a large property that was available, due to the decline in Union commerce. His son began to establish a

community of scholars there, and the tradition and organization have continued to the present.

Over the next few days, Hodge is introduced to the other scholars. Some are quite striking, such as the Japanese chemist there. Japanese are subject to persecution in the United States, as are (for example) Jews. This leads to a discussion of the fate of Jews, who were also massacred in the German Union and have generally relocated to the colony of Uganda (somebody's been reading Theodor Herzl's *Altneuland* (1902, 5662), where such a proposal was described).

The community votes to accept him, Barbara Haggerwells' accusation of procurement notwithstanding. Such is her personality, though, that soon she becomes Hodge's lover.

The community's alienist is intrigued by the mute woman. He develops a startling method to break her shock-induced aphasia. He and others return to the scene of the crime and recreate it, recording the recreation with a tinograph. This serves to break their patient's shock. She turns out Catalina Garcia, a relative of the murdered diplomat's wife, and to have some financial resources, after negotiating with the Spanish Embassy, Catalina is confirmed as being who she is, able to inherit. And she becomes known as "Catty," though she isn't.

Hodge is now free to work on his intellectual passions. He begins researching a historical work on the final phase of the War of Southron Independence. For example, he writes a thesis-level paper on "The Timing of General Stuart's Maneuvers During August 1863 in Pennsylvania". (It is to be noted that Stuart's March Around Meade, while confusing Union communications and deployment, did deprive Lee of good cavalry at a crucial moment in the campaign. [For a work on the timing of General Stuart's maneuvers during August 1963 in Pennsylvania read *An End to Bugling* (1963), the comic fantasy by military historian Edmund G. Love].)

Barbara raises the consideration that Hodge has not tried to communicate with his mother. He demurs, saying that there is nothing to say. Indeed, the plot is structured so that each section of his experiences entails a complete separation from his previous stage of life. Not only has

Hodge not bothered to communicate with his family, he has not written to Tyss, who just might be interested in Haggerhaven. Though Tyss's interest in Haggerhaven might not be the most helpful, given his connections. So there is more than adequate reason for Hodge to drop each phase of his past life when he enters a new one.

Other researches continue. Barbara turns out to be a physicist of some importance, and she takes over a barn to work on a project of her own. Not heavier-than-air flight, which she dismisses as impossible. And the banter regarding this project produces one of the more striking passages of the book:

"Hodge," she said, gray eyes greenish with excitement, "I'm not going to write a book."

"That's nice," I answered idly.
"New, too. Saves time, paper, ink. Sets a different standard; from now on scholars will be known as 'Jones, who didn't write *The Theory of Tidal Waves*,' 'Smith, unauthor of *Gas and Its Properties*,' or 'Backmaker, nonrecorder of *Gettysburg and After*.'"

Actually, instead of writing a paper (or series of papers) describing her theory, she plans to build a prototype device to demonstrate it. Which she proceeds to work on.

In cliché, having rescued Catty twice, first from murder, secondly from post-traumatic stress disorder, Hodge proceeds to espouse her. She has been contributing what she can to the community, and is welcomed, and when Hodge finally marries her, it seems proper.

What was Barbara building? Somewhat confused, Hodge finally realizes what: "You're going to build a ... — an engine which will move through time?"

Yes. And so she begins toil and labor on producing what she calls the HX-1, a device which will send individuals backwards in time to the same place for a fixed period. Or so it works out.

The building isn't helped by the beginnings of a second world war, between the German Union and the Confederacy. Commodity prices shoot up. Even though the United States is not involved, there is considerable concern. And Catty offers, as a peace gesture, to put her entire personal fortune at Barbara's disposal.

Meanwhile, Hodge's master work, *Chancellorsville to the End*, is well in progress, and the first volume is published. But a well-known Confederate scholar of the War has a demurrer, which causes him to have a severe crisis of confidence.

Barbara, by way of contrast, is quite sure, and after much labor the HX-1 is completed. To show her confidence, Barbara is the first time-traveler, going back only for a minute, to a time before her birth.

Over the next few days, she begins sending back other volunteers. However, her concerns are great and her conditions are severe. No one is to bring back anything from the past or indeed use anything from the past. They have to take their own food, for example.

Hodge comes to a decision. They are just a day's walk from Gettysburg. He wants to see the battle personally! To which Barbara assents, and on a fateful day, Hodge is sent back to midnight, July 30, 1863.

In the morning, he walks to Gettysburg. He must be pretty well hardened by now, because he gets there in time. To the east, Buford's cavalry has already faced Hill's divisions which are now engaged with Doubleday's I Corps, and to the north of town Ewell is moving in to fight Schimmelfennig's division of Howard's XI Corps north of town. Not wanting to be the ultimate violation of Barbara's restrictions, Hodge goes south along the Emmetsburg Road, past von Steinwehr's division of Howard's XI Corps.

He decides to rest up in a convenient peach orchard. Union cavalry is withdrawing past him, and he notes their movement with some melancholy. They are followed by a patrol of Confederate troops. All *they* see is a Yank with boots. Boots! He is asked to give them up, and declines.

The officer commanding the patrol remonstrates with the troops, reminding them that robbing civilians is not a good idea. The man seems familiar to Hodge somehow. Then the men began to panic, assured that there are Union troops ahead, and when the captain attempts to stop the flight, he has a very brief struggle with one of the soldiers who ends up blowing his face off before fleeing in panic after his fellow soldiers.

Now Hodge has done it. He sits down beside the corpse and tries to recover his composure. He spent the next days in a daze. Presumably he got away from the body. When he gets back to the farm, he enters the barn near midnight and waits. And waits. When dawn comes, he realizes that something has gone very very wrong.

And when the owner of the farm comes in and sees this stranger in his barn, the “stranger” realizes why he is there. The captain that he had allowed to be killed was familiar, all right; he was Herbert Haggerwells, the founder of Haggerhaven — and ancestor of Barbara. Hodge is thoroughly cut off in time.

He sums up his life briefly. The farmer was quite happy to get an expert hired hand. Hodge is working on the farm, noticing the change of circumstances from the ones he knew. He thinks it better (but then, 1877 was before the end of Reconstruction and the rise of Jim Crow).

And what has he lost? He speculates on an endless cycle of events, each one destroying the previous era. The most lost of people in the world has no purpose but to exist, it seems.

Given the unit composition and position, the most likely unit that Captain Haggerwells and his unruly patrol came from would have been Lane’s Brigade of Pender’s Division of A. P. Hill’s Third

Corps. They were on the extreme right flank of the Confederate Army on the first day.

But why would they be sending patrols that far south? Any Confederate advance would have run into von Steinwehr’s division, or spend so much time evading it that they would be cut off.

Looking at the Gettysburg Trilogy by William Forstchen, Albert Hauser, and some politician, there are a number of events that seem to answer Moore’s scenario. For one thing, if the Confederates had been able to occupy what was then called Sugar Loaf Hill (the name “Little Round Top” did not come until later), Meade could have withdrawn to his preferred position, the Pipe Creek line around Union Mills, close to his supply depot at Winchester. That Forstchen &

Co, have Lee occupying that serves to advance their plot, but that’s another story.

Even given the crushing victory at Union Mills, as bad as the Confederate victory at the Battle of

Gettysburg Hodge knew, the Union rallies. In *Grant Comes East* General Herman Haupt, the railroad commander, describes how he has been stockpiling munitions and rallying militia to hold the line of the Susquehanna, while Grant is coming with troops from the Armies of the Tennessee and Cumberland to form a new army. Until then, Washington City proves itself not an easy position to take. And while the Army of the Potomac has been demoralized, it is possible to rally it for one last battle; even though they lose badly, it buys time for Grant’s Army of the Susquehanna to form.

A similar consideration applies to the post-war period. The industrial areas of the North have not been touched by the Confederate victories. A useful parallel can be made with the circumstances of France after the Franco-Prussian war; the country had been utterly defeated,



deprived of an area of substantial resources, and made to pay an iniquitous sum of reparations. Yet the industry of France had not been affected; and the country recovered.

There is the matter of inflation and deflation. An historical parallel has arisen since the publication of this book. The United States might well resemble contemporary Russia, economically damaged, humiliated, but recovering in strength.

The events of the Confederacy also seem a bit contrived. A series of campaigns leading to the conquest of the entirety of Latin America seems a bit much beyond the resources of the Confederacy, particularly given the nature of its military organization. Such campaigns would require the creation of a regular army. Now it does have a “foreign legion”, the Confederate Legion that recruits vigorously in the United States, but again, this would seem to be perceived as a threat to the independence of the several states of the Confederacy.

Population matters also seem a little odd. The Confederacy has considerable immigration — but the immigrants, like the indigenous populations of South America, and the former slaves, occupy an inferior political status. Somehow the prospect of “Come to the Confederacy and be a perpetual resident alien!” just does not seem to have a lot of appeal.

As for the United States, it is mentioned in at least two places that the political parties and society alike favor a one-child policy, to keep the country from becoming overpopulated. That’s right, they are deliberately shrinking the population, and of course there’s no immigration. Why should the Confederacy try to provoke a war when they can just move in?

Bring the Jubilee was one of the earlier English-language alternate history works that was available in the sixties. The concept dates back to Livy (Titus Livius Patavinus; *Ab urbe condita*, Liber IX Capitulum xvii-xix) and was practiced by among others, Benjamin Disraeli (*The Wondrous Tale of Alroy* (1833), which is considered by some to be the first novel-length alternate history).

Whatever the plausibility of the background, the descriptions of it are striking and impressive; this is a real world, with interactions, results, and events beyond the immediate perceptions of the characters. Who are also themselves striking; Moore chose a variety of perspectives, and has the wit and skill to give them reactions appropriate to their stations in life. This is not a chorus of agreement, all the characters reflecting one world-view, but of different experiences leading to different views of the world.

In a sense, the result both echoes and diverges from, say, de Camp’s “Aristotle and the Gun” (*Astounding*, February 1958 [yes, of course postdating this]). Hodge might well have said “Leave well enough alone” on a personal basis, but he seems cautiously optimistic about the general trends of the world. “That this world is a better place than the one into which I was born, and promises to grow still better, seems true,” Hodge says.

So I had to make other time-lines ...

The name of the farmer who found me in his barn was Thammiss; they had need of a hired hand and I stayed on. Soon enough I learned of what had happened during the days of my shock; instead of occupying the Round Tops, Lee’s army had executed a daring march to the south, leaving the Gettysburg area and heading south to Union Mills, to the vast supply dump of Meade’s army. The great battle that ensued led to the devastation of the Army of the Potomac, and for a few days I thought that a Southron victory was inevitable in any case.

So the war ended, with a settlement as thorough as the one I had known at Reading, but less punitive towards the Southerons. Now President Lincoln, un-martyred, became the target of obliquity in his own party, and of respect in the formerly seceded states, as he sought to end the strains of war. Yet he vigorously pursued the liberation of the Negro.

— Not by Moore, Forstchen, and Gingrich

The name of the farmer who found me in his barn was Thammiss; they had need of a hired hand and I stayed on. Throughout the subsequent year, I followed, idly, the retreat of the Southron armies. I did not know if they would eventually prove

victorious, or what the fate of the nation, or nations would be.

Then, in the spring of the year 1864, news of dire events began to stir even the now-placid area of York. The Southrons had, by some incredible miracle, become resurgent in strength and vigor. The armies of the east had been placed under the command of General Grant, while his erstwhile subordinate General Sherman had been left in command out West. They both had undertaken to conquer the Southron armies facing them, and now both armies were utterly devastated.

The most horrifying news of all was when General Lee's army crossed into Maryland again, and in a shockingly brief battle occupied Washington City. President Lincoln was not captured or killed, though, but he was forced to sign a humiliating armistice, and to recognize the independence of the Southron states.

In the summer, a traveling exhibitionist came to



the county fair. Mr. Thammis said he was displaying one of the new Southron weapons, found on a battlefield, and I wished to indulge my curiosity as to how it was made. He granted me leave to see the fair.

The tent where the exhibition was taking place was not crowded early in the morning, when I arrived, and I could examine the weapon closely. To most people seeing it, the weapon would not make sense. It was of a configuration that seemed unmakeable, and I made out a maker's mark that identified it as being made in a place called Yugoslavia, which puzzled me.

It was not until I was walking back to the Thammis farm that the realization came to me. Someone, I concluded, had repeated the researches that Barbara had done, and built a HX-2. But why and wherefore?

There would still be no Barbara. No Catty.

— Not by Moore and Turtledove



The furthest thing from monstrous is la belle Rose-Marie, regrettably absent from this issue except for her invaluable help behind the scenes. We go to press March 14, 2015 – her birthday (as well as our nephew John's). As ever, my thanks to her for saving my layouts and making *Challenger* PDF-ready – and for ever so much more. *Love* this lady!

One Man's Poison

Walt Wentz

Dear Sir, Madam or Machine:

This is to acknowledge receipt of your "Survey," sent in response to my complaint about your ant bait stations. I was a bit bemused to note that your "survey" focused entirely on your *complaint agent's response* to my complaint, rather than the complaint itself. You inquired whether she seemed properly concerned about my feelings – if she had felt my pain, walked a mile in my moccasins, and empathized with the full depth and horror of my emotions.

Why should it matter to you, to me or to Gawd Almighty if your Complaint Department employee went home at night and soaked her pillow with bitter tears of grief and remorse, or merely began kicking cocker spaniels across the street to relieve her feelings? The point is not the depth and intensity of her reaction to my complaint about your ant bait stations – the point is that the damned things *did not work!*

After I had carefully placed those bait stations on my ant-infested kitchen counter, as per directions, I saw the ants walking completely around those plastic doodads, with every expression of contempt and disdain. When I set one with its inviting entrances directly on a busy ant trail, I saw the ants ostentatiously making two right-angle turns to avoid its contaminating presence, like born-again Baptists crossing the street to avoid a Skid Road honky-tonk. Although the more diligent workers studiously avoided the stations, I actually saw some deadbeat ants loafing around *behind* them, probably hiding

out from the straw boss while they sneaked a smoke. I watched those damned ant stations for days, for weeks, and never saw an ant willingly set foot inside them.

When I finally broke down and called your complaint department, your employee politely advised me to scrub down the counter tops with vinegar to eliminate the ants' scent trails, and to carefully remove every molecule of food the ants could possibly reach – except, of course, for the bait in the stations.

So I marinated the countertop, scrubbed and sanitized every food-molecule-bearing surface, started going out for my own meals and waited impatiently for the starving ants to fall ravenously upon the poison. In response, the ants went on a hunger strike. They would wander out of their crevices, make a short circuit around the counter, waggle their antennae peevishly at the bait stations and then go sulkily home, still hungry. (Parenthetically, I would like to inquire, if you are going to go to the trouble of manufacturing an ant poison that only "works" because the ants will starve themselves to death rather than eat it, aren't we missing the point entirely? The point is to kill them expeditiously, not make them suffer interminable famine in the process).

Unfortunately, not even starvation intervened in this case. The ants seemed to disappear for a few weeks, but they were not dead – they had simply shifted their search to different pastures.

Then, one bold, lone ant explorer, a chitin-clad Columbus, voyaged forth over the vast, vinegar-scented expanse of the counter top, climbed the glossy crystalline wall of the cookie jar, discovered a Northwest Passage under the heavy lid, and found therein one stale and ancient ginger snap, which had been overlooked in the Grand Food Cleanup.

As he returned in triumph, bearing trophies of his great discovery, the rush began.

When I came downstairs next

morning, I found an eager horde trampling the full length of the counter and clambering single-file up the side of the jar, like the Sourdoughs of the Klondike gold rush mounting the Chilkoot Pass, to fall on that prehistoric ginger snap with cries of glee and haul its nuggets back to their safe-deposit boxes in the nest.

Uttering expletives deleted, I dumped the tattered contents of the cookie jar, along with several dozen scrambling prospectors, and rinsed it out, ignoring the indignant protests on the counter top. It was time to bring out the big guns.

For decades, I had owned a tiny bottle labeled “Ant Syrup,” which I kept on a high shelf in the garage and only brought out when the ants got rambunctious in the kitchen. A sticky drop or two near their entrances, and the swarming hordes would vanish, unknown, unnoted and unmourned. But my daughter Amber had declared the Ant Syrup an evil and noxious substance, which was bad for the environment – at least that bit of it occupied by the ants – and had disposed of it somehow, leaving me defenseless against the chitinous hordes. So I was compelled to try your ant bait stations, with results hereinabove cited.

Exasperated, I went to our local Ace Hardware Store, one of those grand old small-town business fixtures which still carries such necessities of life as scythe handles, fencing pliers and cast-iron stovepipe dampers, and asked if they had any of that evil old Ant Syrup. Surprisingly, they did – although it was now under a new name, and in clear plastic capsules rather than tiny brown glass bottles.

Taking it eagerly home, I sprinkled a few drops around the entrances of the ants’ abode. The sullen prospectors, their occupations gone, suddenly stopped their aimless pacing, swung around and hurried to

the droplets like iron filings to a magnet. Soon, every drop was surrounded by a neat black fringe of guzzling ants.

They called in every ant in three counties to help haul away the bounty, and the party went on all night, with considerable “on with the dance, let joy be unconfined.” The new arrivals all bellied up to the bar in manly, or antly, fashion, and then wobbled off homeward with full cargoes as others took their places at the brass rail.

There were no hangovers the morning after, mainly because there were no survivors to speak of. The six-fisted drinkers of the night before were now all extremely *requiescat in pace, hic jacet and de mortuis nil nisi bonum*. I did notice a couple of ant teetotalers wandering aimlessly about, no doubt wondering where everyone else had got to. But the Great Ant Plague of 2011 was obviously ended – no thanks to your ant bait stations.

In conclusion, therefore, rather than fill in your irrelevant Survey about your complaint agent’s feelings, I would earnestly advise you to repackage your “ant bait stations” – perhaps as miniature doilies or doormats for doll-houses – and again invest in the robust home remedies of our ancestors, who wasted no time in emulating the emotions of their customers, but instead concentrated upon the essential task of making household pests feel distinctly deceased.

With all due regards,



Walt
Wentz

Greg Benford
c/o Challenger

Chall is always fun. I look forward to comments on my piece in *Spartacus*. I'm in Paris, headed for Africa tomorrow.

We'll restrain our cries of pity.

Joe Green's adept essay says "Verne, for unknown reasons, had his fictional characters build the gigantic gun that was to shoot a manned capsule to the Moon in Florida. It was located very close to the same latitude as the actual launch site of the Apollo/Saturn vehicles that did indeed

Baycon but I recall the great people I met, the open MJ smoking (good weed!) and leaving the Hugos early because I disliked them generally even then. I had a room at the Claremont, having run the Nebulas there in spring 1968 and made an early reservation. I met Joanna Russ, Zelazny, many others – my transition from fan-centered world (I'd attended the 1964 Oakland worldcon; the Breendoggle was the swan song of my fmz-centered life) to the pro world. Baycon's still my fave, tied with the most recent LACon.

Mike's GOH speech is the best I've ever

THE CHORUS LINES

carry men to the Moon. It's difficult to credit this to anything but the wildest of coincidences". I saw evidence in a calculation at the Verne museum in Nantes that he knew the centrifugal advantage of launching nearer the equator, to pick up rotational velocity. Arguing that the USA would be the emergent techno-power, he picked Florida over southern Texas because of ease of naval movement.

Joe misses Wells' most influential prediction of an "atom bomb" in *The World Set Free*. Wells confused nuclear and atomic processes but did see such a bomb would be decisive. Leo Szilard met H.G. Wells in London in 1929, and in 1932 read *The World Set Free*, written in 1913 about a worldwide atomic war in the 1950s. Wells and Szilard feared such a war and also speculated that the only way for humans to escape Earth to visit other planets was if they were powered by "atomic" energy. (This idea will come; nuclear rockets we've already developed and have yet to use. I expect the Chinese, not being Politically Correct, will be first.)

*As I expect the next man on the moon –
and the first woman! – will be Chinese.*

Mike Resnick shines in this issue with two knockout pieces. He recalls the heat and chaos of

read. He can be funny in print – never easy, seldom seen. My worldcon GOH speech in 1999 was earnest, few jokes.

Jim Ivers is spot on about many movies here. I think his concluding quotations from Peter Thiel put the case well: we need views of our future that have plausible problems and solutions, showing the case to be made on both sides. I'd point to geoengineering as a vast new technology that we'll need by about 2030, and the predictable disputes over it, as a good subject for a big, sprawling film. (I've worked on this for DARPA so know the issues, and they're very big. I did write a story about this for the volume *Welcome to the Greenhouse* and it was reprinted in the magazine of the National Academy – first appearance of fiction in that august journal.)

Fine issue!

Ryan Speer
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Your mention of Eric Russell's *Sinister Barrier* makes me think about the truly shoddy cover art for the 1948 Fantasy Press first edition. That is one rare cringeworthy cover from all the

old Shasta and Gnome and Fantasy books that I have handled. But I never have read it, and I'm sad to hear that contents are also disappointing.

Also, the "Contested Ground" intro to Benford's Loncon piece seems a bit more politically astute and focused than the other of his articles placed earlier in the issue, I think. But I'm not sure why it would be surprising to find (gasp) Marxists in the UK. I was in London just a month (alas) after Loncon and did make a point of dropping in to the Bookmarks book shop run in Bloomsbury by some flavor of socialist organization. They were playing modern jazz and the clerk sneered at me (I guess they don't like lumpen anymore), but I was still happy to at least have the option of looking at their pricey wares, exotic stuff for an American.

Jim Ivers
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Re: *Challenger* 37 & 38 – Really enjoyed "Bad Time Inc." WWII history is a favorite subject. Have heard similar stories (and seen newsreels) of U.S. bombers limping back to base in the UK after being shot to Hell with large holes and huge sections of the aircraft missing. Those planes were incredibly robust. They were built like tanks and saved countless lives as a result. Today's flimsy commercial jets are pathetic by comparison. Despite all our super-advanced space age technology and know-how, our passenger planes are like flying beer cans that frequently rip apart from the stresses of flight – and not a single Messerschmitt in sight.

To me the most irritating thing about this supposedly modern, high-tech 21st century is that almost nothing works as it's supposed to. Nearly everything I own that runs on electricity is either broken, frequently craps out, contains a fatal glitch or is designed to be obsolete and unfixable in a few years. From WWII to the early 60s, things were built to last – and much of it still works (like my friend's 1955 refrigerator). Most everything made from the '70s to 2000 is on the trash heap. The one funny line that stays with me from the otherwise forgettable *Spaceballs* (1987) is an exasperated Rick Moranis (as Dark Helmet), unable to launch his death star weapon, yelling "It's the future – and nothing works!"

Re: JFK Conspiracy story – just saw a *Lost History* episode about JFK's missing brain. The cloning theory is amusing, but I've never understood the point of that field of weird science. How will it ever be practical? And is there a reason to continue other than "Because we can"? I could see organs being grown for transplant or saving/resurrecting endangered or extinct species – short of a *Jurassic Park*-like disaster. Cloning pets is the type of stupid and selfish thing rich people do, ignoring the surplus of animals in need of adoption. Cloning humans seems equally pointless, especially today with so many unsolvable problems related to or caused by overpopulation in food-depleted regions (a very inconvenient truth no one wants to talk about). Great leaders, and great tyrants, were created by their childhood and adult experiences within the cultural/historical events of their time. Genetics has little or nothing to do with forming a person's character or core beliefs. Those traits are unique. The main argument against cloning is usually along the lines of "What if they cloned Hitler?" (or some other douchebag from recent history). Hitler became a monster because of an abusive father who nearly beat him to death on several occasions. In fact, Hitler, Stalin, and Saddam Hussein were all exposed to violence and abuse early on, instilling a life-long belief that ruthless brute force was the only way to survive and succeed.

*I think you can see paranoia and obsessive narcissism in photos of Hitler as a child or from World War I – the influence on him that has never been adequately plumbed. **Explaining Hitler**, Ron Rosenbaum's splendid collection of essays on the subject, attacks its title task from many angles – and finally admits defeat. Hitler was a force bubbling up from the dark interplay of distorted nature and perverse history; he **can't** be explained.*

Some final thoughts on Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* also relate to der Fuehrer in the final days of the war. While Berlin was going up in flames, Germany's increasingly deranged Chancellor spent hours tinkering with a huge scale-model of New Berlin, dreaming of a future that would never materialize. A monstrous collection of over-sized buildings, a Great Dome too large to be built, even today, and a Triumphant Arch four times the size of the one in

Paris. I wonder if the fever-dream of *Metropolis* was an inspiration. Hitler devised a cold, inhuman architecture designed to intimidate with a crushing sense of overwhelming power. The last Ozymandias: “Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!”

Another book I recommend is architect Walter Speer’s *Inside the Third Reich*. Cynics may say that Speer spilled his guys at Nuremberg to save his neck from the noose – remember, he used slave labor as Minister of Armaments – but his honesty and insight here is invaluable. I believe he mentions Hitler’s Berlin model.

Re: my Future Films article – some may have noticed I left out the clever cult film *The Tenth Victim* (Italy, 1965), a personal favorite that has aged surprisingly well. The story, which has some wonderful mod designs and fashions, concerns a legal human hunting contest that’s sponsored and televised. It anticipates today’s reality shows (especially *Survivor*), out-of-control commercialism, and violent entertainments. I left it out because, back when writing for *The Kobb Log*, I planned on doing an article on human-hunt films (and TV episodes) inspired by *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932). This struck me as an interesting and original idea. Recently I received *Exploitation Retrospect* #52 in the mail, a slick genre-movie zine that’s running a couple of my reviews. And there on page 7 was a full-page ad for a new McFarland book, *The Most Dangerous Cinema: People Hunting People on Film* by Bryan Senn. Oh, crap. Considering this important-looking tome the world has been waiting for costs a whopping \$45, I doubt many people will read it. (Why are McFarland’s books so impossibly expensive?) Given that, I still plan to write the article for my humble zine, *Mostly Retro* (for sale dirt cheap on eBay).

Also regret leaving out *Demolition Man* (1993), a funny satire of political correctness gone mad in a non-violent but bland and wimpy *Brave New World* of 2032. Sandra Bullock’s cop character is even named Huxley (get it?). Everything deemed “bad” is now illegal (salt, smoking, caffeine, meat, chocolate, contact sports, gasoline, non-educational toys, even kissing). Sex is reduced to a virtual reality experience and bad language is fined. Conversation is reduced to an absurd Orwellian happy-speak. Everyone says “Be well” and phrases like “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”. Well-designed pan-cultural fashions include Indian-inspired robes and caps while the ruling elite wear Westernized kimono ensembles. A few details are dated. A phone call is a “FiberOp”, no mobile phones, laser discs instead of DVDs, and very crude, clunky computer graphics (which must have looked cutting-edge in 1993). All in all, the concept is a remake of *Just Imagine* (1930). We need a movie like this (such as *Minority Report*) made every 30 or 40 years to chart our changing expectations of the future. Just retrieved a now-obsolete VHS copy of this film from my dusty Hall of Records and am enjoying a second look after twenty years. (Good lord, has it been that long?)

Re: Mike Resnick’s Chicon address. Am currently working on an epic-length history of sexploitation films (silents to the sixties) for what may be two issues of *Mostly Retro*. Was amazed to read about Resnick’s involvement with some of the people I’ve been researching. In particular, H.G. Lewis. He started out, like Russ Meyer, making the first nudie-cuties in the early sixties then, for good or ill, pioneered the “Gore” subgenre with the notorious *Blood Feast* (1963) followed by *Two Thousand Maniacs* and *Color Me Blood Red*. I’d love to know which screenplays Resnick wrote for him.

Also surprised to read about his working for porn publisher Rueben Sturman, who reminds me of the smut king in Lewis’ *Scum of the Earth* (1963) sexpotboiler. Sturman took over distribution for the prolific Leonard Burtman (who cranked out dozens of 50s-70s girlie and fetish mags: *Bizarre Life*, *Exotica*, *High Heels*, *Satana*, *Masque*, *Exotique*, and made the film *Satan in High Heels*) as well as artist/publisher John Willie (*Bizarre*, *The Perils of Gwendoline* comic, etc.). Those insider stories, including Anton LaVey (the guy who put the fun in Satanism), made for fascinating reading. As an “ink-stained scribe” who does research on people I’ll never meet and places/time periods I’ll never visit, it’s really something to hear from someone who has actually “been there, done that.”

Rounding out an excellent issue #38 is a sketch by William Rotsler. A really interesting guy who did it all – artist, author, girlie

photographer, actor, and director of some of the more arty, surreal sexploitation films (*The Agony of Love*, *The Girl with the Hungry Eyes*, 1966-67). He even filmed *The Godson* (1971) in Harlan Ellison's book-filled apartment (Ellison can be glimpsed in a brief cameo). What a life. I look forward to writing about his film career and seeing how the next issue of *Challenger* turns out.

Gaze. And when you write that piece about Rotsler, I hope you'll consider these pages for its debut.

Martin Morse Wooster

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Many thanks for *Challenger* 38. Greg Benford should be aware that Schindler is not a German company; it's Swiss. Perhaps that is why the German fans he talked to were confused. But I do agree with him that the obsessions of younger fans towards political correctness are more than a bit disturbing. There was a counter-petition to the effort to push Lovecraft off the World Fantasy Award, which I signed. I will say the obsessions of the left-wing internet mob towards PC and a smaller, but equally toxic group of right-wing SF writers who feel devoted to holding a 24-hour perpetual pity party is that someone like Mary Robinette Kowal, who came across in her role as Toastmaster at the World Fantasy Convention as a perfectly pleasant person, should be battered both by lefties like "Ranging Hate" and right-wing goofballs like Vox Day. There really are too many fans who spend too much time in flame wars these days; they need to turn off the computer and go out and get some fresh air.

I very much enjoyed Mike Resnick's account of Baycon. The Phil Farmer speech seems like one of the more surreal moments in the history of Worldcons. I attended a panel on Baycon at the 2004 Noreascon, in which Jack Chalker told many of the stories Mike told but said there was so much about Baycon that he couldn't tell it in one session and the appalling saga would have to conclude at another convention. Then Chalker died. Now granted Chalker was one of fandom's great talkers (I once heard him for 12 hours straight at a 1979 Paracon) as well as fandom's most unreliable narrators, it's good to hear a reliable report of one of the strangest Worldcons ever.

Joseph Green's articles on Verne and Wells were fun. I spent much of the winter reading *The Mysterious Island*. Since much of Verne has been bowdlerized and abridged, I read a recent Modern Library translation. It's, in many ways, a really antique adventure, of the school of "Say, you can build a furnace if you start with two sticks and a wad of chewing gum!" But then you realize that Verne periodically leaves plot coupons for the castaways, such as a chest that contains steel tools, seeds, and technical models. Then I filtered Verne through both *Lost* and the video games where people keep picking up power points, and the novel made a great deal more sense. Verne knew how to keep his readers turning pages, and I was glad to have finished this long, majestic book.

I've never read Jim Ivers before, but he's a good writer on bad movies. He does enjoy 1960s cheese, but who doesn't? I'd like to read what he has to say on *Die Frau im Mond* and the late 1970s space operas that imitated *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*.

Jim, that's a hint.

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HEAVY is the work that comes to mind after reading *Challenger* #38. There is a lot of material in the issue. You could have divided it into two or possibly three issues. As it is, an adequate LoC might run 10 or 20 pages. The future is an awfully big topic. I'm going to limit myself to the time from now until the end of the century. If this was going to be an article, the title might be...

THE MASSACRE IS THE MESSAGE

I think Malthus will finally catch up with us in about the middle of the century when the human population reaches around ten billion. The mechanism is described by the Calhoun Experiment. That is the experiment with the rats in the box. They reproduce themselves to extinction. Along the way, they become increasingly violent.

I have seen the theory that urbanization will end the population explosion. Urbanization has been progressing at a considerable pace for

the last two centuries. The population increase hasn't slowed down as yet. I think this particular theory is pure smoke.

The events of 1914-1918 have been referred to as the Great War. The events of the late 21st century may be referred to as the Greater War. People will kill each other for any reason or no reason. (You are an inch shorter than I am so you must die!!!) The rats in the box didn't care what other rats thought about God. They didn't have any economic systems or ideologies. They just knew that killing felt good.

For a number of years, I have thought things would start being notably bad around the middle of the century and get continuously worse. Recent events suggest I may have been wrong as to how things start. Things may just get worse and worse from now on out. At the end of the 21st century, two or three billion people will still be alive on the planet.

Technology will continue to advance during the entire century. The really big developments will be in genetic engineering and medicine. There will be resistance to genetic engineering but it will happen anyway. Relatively few humans will ever migrate across space. However, given our propensity for reproduction, we will probably infest this end of the galaxy within a few thousand years. Things could be worse.

As Greg Benford indicates, the level of hostility in fandom has been rising in recent years. It seems like a lot of younger people wander into the field looking for a fight. If nothing immediately offends them, they will just keep looking. Despite appearances, I don't think this hostility is based on anything going on in fandom. I don't even think it is about racism, sexism or any of the other topics that are being booted about.

There is an ocean of anger in the United States. The anger is about the evaporation of the American dream. Young people have been told they could get a good job and have a fine standard of living if they graduated from college. They graduated from college and usually became bond servants to the banks, but there weren't any jobs. Heck, nobody even needs them as gun fodder for a war. They are the unnecessary generation.

They blame the old white guys for this situation. To some extent, they are correct. Old

white guys who make more than a million dollars a year are pretty much responsible for the situation. However, most white guys aren't in that category. When all the rich old white guys in the world meet in a basement every Tuesday night they don't invite the rest of us. Sometimes, I think we ought to establish a League of Evil Old White Guys. The purpose of the organization would be to congregate for the purposes of skulking, muttering, and conspiring. How can we disappoint the youth of America?

I think poor old H. P. Lovecraft suffered from Archie Bunker syndrome. Archie wasn't really a hater. He was on the bottom of the heap and got stepped on a lot. He was angry and vented through his mouth. Lovecraft was in the same situation. He was poor his whole life. Everybody needs somebody to look down on. Otherwise, they must be the lowest things in all creation, and most people can't stand that.

If the World Fantasy Convention absolutely must replace those cute little Easter Island heads they've been using as awards, Bernadette Bosky's idea of using a chimera is the best idea I have seen. Chimerical means fantastic, and the composite nature of the chimera could symbolize all of fantasy.

There are a lot of ways to look at the works of H. G. Wells. Joe Green looks at his works in terms of prediction. Personally, I think he was far more allegorical than predictive. However, there are some cases where you have to consider the nature of prediction.

When Edison had his staff look for a substance to serve as a filament for a light bulb was he "predicting" light bulbs? How about Heinlein's story "Waldo"? Heinlein described a device and someone else went out and built it. Is that prediction?

In *The War in Air*, Wells has dirigible aircraft carriers. Tennyson beat Wells to predicting the use of aircraft in warfare, but Wells idea was quite specific. It was specific enough that the United States Navy built a couple of dirigible aircraft carriers in the 1920s. The dirigibles carried half a dozen biplanes which had something like a tail hook on the upper wing and no landing gears. I don't know whether the men who eventually built tanks had read *Land of the Ironclads*. They might have denied it even if they

had. Readers in later decades would definitely call the vehicle in the story a tank.

I presume most fans realize that “In the Country of the Blind” isn’t really about a place where all the people have visual problems. Most people probably don’t think of *War of the Worlds* being imperialism on the other foot (or tentacle). It’s no fun when the other guy has the superior weapons.

The House of Lords study of 1820 showed that chronic malnutrition of mine and factory workers was creating a sub-race of mentally retarded dwarves. The mad Dr. Moreau was turning beasts into men. The real world was turning men into beasts. Likewise in *The Time Machine*. Wells had discovered that some workers in London never saw sunlight. Advance that 180,000 years and what do you get? You get slaves who serve you but eat you in the end.

Things to Come had the war that ends civilization beginning in 1940. It was one hell of a war and the date was right. It didn’t end civilization but it might have. Wells was sort of wrong but generally right. War really is a very bad idea. Unfortunately, that never stops us from engaging in it.

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I’m not sure Criswell is the best person to cite in a quotation about the future. I once had a book of his predictions, *Criswell Predicts*, which had a prediction that a vast black band of something from space would encircle the earth and absorb all air, exterminating us all, sometime in the 1990s. And I thought I kept up to date on the news.

There’s a lot of “time catching up to fiction” stuff out there. The Heinlein fans celebrated Dan Davis’s two releases from cold sleep, from *The Door into Summer* (1957; NHOL G.131). The technology (except for Roombas and ATM cash dispensers) didn’t exist but then we did not have the nuclear war, so I guess it balanced out.

I have been oppressed with various issues that constrain my fanac – and also going to see people. Presumably when my many and hideous confrontations with my former employers and

other items are resolved, there will be a searing article about it all, which I will feel well enough to write.

There was a notorious bleat from someone about how there were no organized cosplayers or fiction-reads at Worldcon. Presumably from someone who thought that the professional staff should be setting such things up, and didn’t bother to look at the con website under “volunteers”. Cosplaying was at the first Worldcon! Courtesy of 4SJ Ackerman, of course.

I’ve come to consider Verne the first techno-thriller writer. Tom Clancy was in the habit of describing in great detail the gear Jack Ryan was using. I’ve seen worse, including one writer who gave the full designation of every weapon every time it was used. But then, this is (one) definition of SF; fiction that shows how science and technology change human society.

Leon Stover became fond of me for some reason and I got review copies of all his annotated editions of Wells’ books. If you could ignore some of Stover’s more fixed ideas (i.e., his comments about the Indo-European colors red, white, and blue) he did give a lot of explanation of not only Wells’ ideas but the background details that the contemporary reader knew but more recent ones would not. (And I did catch him on one mistake about the British Army in *The War of the Worlds*; he confused the Horse Guards, the office building where the British Army command was, with the Royal Horse Guards, the Household Cavalry regiment, and getting it right would have made his point stronger.)

But Wells had the problem that his stories tended to “everything will be wonderful once everyone comes to see it my way”. For example, *Wings over the World* in *Things to Come*, which finds a guy who has patched up some sort of stability after the ruination of Britain in the war, drops paratroopers and gas, and takes over, because he doesn’t live up to their standards. In the original work, it was poison gas, but by the time the story got to the screen it was sleep gas.

Baycon: Jack Chalker talked about that at Chicon in 2000. The guy who organized the masquerade had a budget of \$1000. He spent \$900 on three bands and \$100 on incense, and then wondered why things went wrong. Chalker was going to tell us the rest of the story at the next Worldcon ... but then he died. Coincidence?

Reading Jim Ivers' description of how bad movies make the future out to be, and how now that we've caught up to them, it wasn't, I was reminded of something Roger Ebert had in his book of movie tropes, Ebert's *Bigger Little Movie Glossary* (1999). The item was submitted by Merwyn Grote, and was titled "Orwell That Ends Wells" (Ebert, p. 146) and describes Ivers' point about the prediction of gloom and doom. That's a nice extended pun, don't you think?

The Chorus Lines: The decline of CanFanzineDom is worse than even what Dale Speirs said. I believe the only CanFaned doing actual paper zines is ... Rodney Leighton.

But see the notes in the following LOC.

Well, ChrIs GarCia bewails his writer's block, but for him, "writer's block" is one fanzine a week, so there's that.

Milt Stevens discusses how in a Burroughs story you'd never think you were in Kansas. But Kansas does feature in one Burroughs story; *The Moon Men* (1926) where some poor devil staggers into the ruins of Chicago and mentions that there's famine in Kansas. Burroughs had almost all his series linked one way or another (i.e. *The Moon Maid* [1926], the first volume in that series, has a space flight setting out to reach Barsoom, though they don't make it), which is not the most cheering thought for the future (Orwell That Ends Wells again). But *The Moon Men* started out as *Under the Red Flag* (1919), a thriller about a Soviet conquest of America. Burroughs wasn't particularly coy, either, the general term for the administration of America in *The Moon Men* is "Tevios" which is "Soviet" spelled backwards.

Very well put article by Greg Benford about the foolishness that is destroying cons. Not that any of those doing so will read it, because it's longer than 140 characters (the length of a Twitter feed, for those who have so far mercifully avoided the communication method for the ADHD generation).

Maybe someone should ask H. P. Lovecraft himself what he thinks of the proposal to change the World Fantasy Award figure to Octavia Butler. I'm not kidding, you can do it:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtAoPbw5SmUJHLpDJe67m0g>

Email: AskLovecraft@gmail.org

He answered a question for Tim Lane, so you know it's for real.

Too weird.

Mike Resnick and the fencing team: Don't you mean Mick Dundee's famous comment, "That's not a knife. *This* is a knife," comparing a switchblade and a Bowie.

As for his experience in writing porn (Andy Offutt from Kentucky outdid him, I think), now he's won. Or at least the genre has won, though now it's all by women for women. 100 million women bought *Fifty Shades of Grey* and Mike or Andy could have knocked that off in an afternoon with enough time to read the new issue of *Analog*.

*Then there's the UFO porn, **Fifty Shades of Greys.***

I presume those "young geniuses making eight hundred thousand bucks a year" who wonder "why can't one of the twins be black" read Samuel Delany's *Nova* (1968), which as you know, Bob, featured identical triplets, one of whom was an albino. Sadly, that was the last book Delany wrote before he got a word processor and could really grind it out. I knew a guy who was waiting for the sequel to *Stars in My Pockets like Grains of Sand* (1984).

Rodney Leighton **Address withheld**

Thanks for *Challenger* #38 and *Spartacus* #4. Don't mistake me: I was happy to receive them and read them. This email business is troubling me in some ways. Being basically computer illiterate I don't know much about it but obvious Chuck Connors has to print the things and mail them. It seems to me that if he is doing that, well, e-zines should be responded to in kind, with email. Which means that I have to write something to – say – you, and ship it to England where Chuck has to retype it [*scan and OCR it these days – Chuck*] and ship it to you. Seems like an imposition. On the other hand, he set up the e-mail thing so maybe he wants to do stuff like this. But then I have lately been reading that some people say it is easier and/or cheaper to print off the web than from e-mail ...

I have this notion of keeping *Rodney's Fanac* for paper zines. But as various folks have

pointed out, fanac covers a lot of things. Thinking I might use a section of it for e-zines.

Something may pop in *Broken Toys*, but you may have noted in the latest *Alexiad*, I mention that I am getting close to a “no LoCs” policy again. I did write a letter to Joe, but it was entirely self-serving – I told him not to print it if he didn’t want to. Chuck wants me to LoC all kinds of things, zines off the web and all. I don’t think I want to write LoCs.

*It’s odd that I should also eschew LOCing, as letters to Julie Schwartz comics were my first fanac, but I prefer to respond to zines through my notices/reviews in **The Zine Dump**. Why?*

Dunno.

[So here I am,] says Chuck [playing Chinese piggy in the middle. Rodney’s original comments to me – regarding the eFanzine stuff I print off for him – was that as the faneds had not sent them directly to him then he felt odd about writing a LoC and sending it to them “out of the blue” so to speak. Personally I don’t see the difference between a paper-only fanzine and an e-fanzine in regard to the fact that – no doubt – the creator behind the paper would always appreciate a letter back discussing anything.]

Anyway, I enjoyed the zines, mostly. In *Spartacus*, I read everything, don’t know if there is much to say. The old me would want to write about the Frenkel deal and urge disclosure and revelation, especially of the woman in question. If she doesn’t want people looking at her boobs, why are they on display? Must have been to some extent. Could get a lot of bombastic commentary out of that I suspect. I see you were planning on printing Tim Bolgeo’s side of that weird event in *Challenger*; though it doesn’t seem to be there. Would be interesting to read. I don’t know the guy, but I do like reading about controversies.

Which is also part of the reason I don’t want to write LoCs. My tendency to stick my oar in any type of situation. The results are sometimes fun, sometimes amusing, but sometimes a little upsetting. Probably best to steer clear.

Gregory Benford’s “Our Old Future” is great – very informative and entertaining. I was disappointed in his Loncon report. I ignored the poem. As much as I like Harvia toons and Thayer writing, if such ever appears, I don’t read poetry.

*As I insist often in this **Challenger**, you’re missing a lot.*

