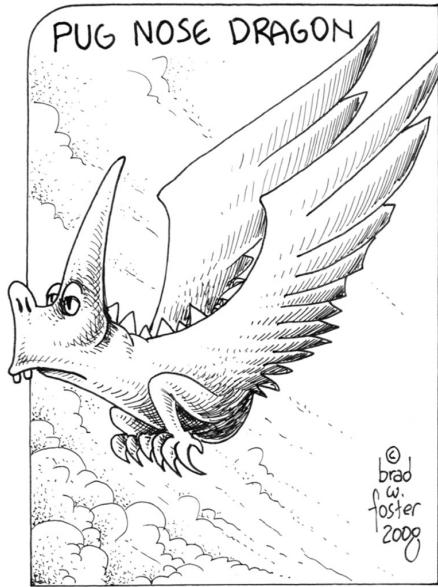


# Royal Swiss Navy Gazette #16

December 2008



## Contents

Garth 1.0.....	1
Garth 2.0.....	2
Letters of Comment.....	3
Royal Swiss Navy Position Papers.....	5
Newslike Messages.....	6
Your August Horoscope .....	6
Fan News.....	7
Different Values of "Fandom".....	10
Cheng Ho Discovers America!.....	12
Runes.....	17
Fanzines Received.....	19

*The Royal Swiss Navy Gazette* #16 (December 2008) is the work of Garth Spencer, who goes on living in Vancouver, BC, Canada. Please send comments, subscriptions, suggestions, and/or submissions to Garth Spencer (the Editor), at garthspencer@shaw.ca or **(new mailing address) via P.O. Box 74122, Hillcrest Park, Vancouver, BC, CANADA V5V 3P0.** *The Royal Swiss Navy Gazette* solicits electronic submissions, and black and white line illustrations in JPG or GIF format, and offers contributor's copies.

*The Royal Swiss Navy Gazette* is now posted regularly at efanazines.com. The hardcopy edition is printed most excellently by the good people at Copies Plus, at 1950 West Broadway, Vancouver, BC, tel. 604-731-7868.

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## **Garth 1.0**

I know why this issue is so late! I was depressed! And/or broke and/or sick and/or too something else.

Life continues in its daily round, at the place I now call Fort Dead Parrot. The main news is that I now have no job (again), a laptop, and a \$5,000 bank overdraft to pay off. I must be a grownup now.

At some point in the last year, Edge Science Fiction and Fantasy Publishing started sending copies of their books for review in *BCSFazine*. I'm still looking for reviewers.

Since November, I have been organizing a Discordian Meetup group meeting at local café, rather than organizing Royal Swiss Navy meetings at my place. I expect you all know about the Great Goddess Discordia and how Chaos rules the world.

### *Losing my job again:*

I was let go from the insurance adjusters' office in August, allegedly because my skill set didn't match the demands of the growing group of independent adjusters. I have been getting on with job-hunting, finally, but have put off applying for EI.

I have been job hunting, but over 90% of the effort seems to be waste motion, which is not terribly motivating. Maybe I have to go freelance and offer documentary-research, or at least proofreading services.

There is some freelance work I am doing, mainly for an independent trademark agent in Kitsilano, but also there are some projects I am to pursue with a little old lady in New Westminster.

Now, I've been through this before. And I'm used to the idea that something about me strikes people as a bit off-putting, maybe creepy – just because I may have Asperger's, or something similar. I just want to know how to hold down a job for more than a couple of years, or have an enduring relationship. This is just weird. What do I do about it?

Maybe I should write a play based on this stuff.

### *Techie Talk:*

I succumbed to temptation and got myself a second-hand Thinkpad laptop this year. When this Thinkpad crashed, I even got the money together to buy another one (ignoring the fact that I was not successfully paying down my bank overdraft). This prose here is coming to you by grace of a Dell Latitude D600. Comes with an external disk drive, wireless modem and all.

*Fiction:*

More and more I think about writing, but don't know if I have the storytelling power, or a great deal of insight into people. We shall just have to see.

Sporadically, over the last quarter-century or so, I have attempted to gather the kind of materials I would need to be a fiction writer – guidelines, marketing procedures, SF market news and addresses, everything besides writing fiction itself. A few times I even made myself a bit of an authority on Canadian small-press genre publishing, which admittedly was quite small enough for a self-educated amateur to scope out.

The thing is, I started doing this in the early 1980s, just as Canadians were starting to do a lot of their own genre publishing, entirely aside from the prevailing scene that was dominated by foreign-owned branch plants of Penguin or Doubleday on the one hand, or subsidized regional/poetry small presses on the other. Now, there may be a score of independent publishers – enduring markets, rather than the undercapitalized flash-in-the-pan periodicals that had prevailed, up to the 1970s. I say “may be” because just as it appeared our domestic publishing scene was maturing in some sense, along came the Internet; a good many publishers are only identifiable as websites, not as postal addresses, and of course a good many now buy world rights, rather than first North American book or serial rights. Some things have fundamentally changed.

Maybe lugging a portable computer around will facilitate my writing the stuff I didn't get around to.

## **Garth 2.0**

Can you reinvent yourself at 52? I think I have had just about enough of the Garth I have been for about a half-century. What do I have to cut out that I don't need, and what kind of agenda shall I take on?

For one thing, how much of my time do I waste? I was going through my disks, pulling stuff to go to my forthcoming website. This turned up the following list, which you may find redundant, but may tell me where I'm wasting my time:

- An article on how to build fictitious planets, starting with some random figures and a calculator (and not even use calculus);
- An article on how to invent languages;
- An article surveying crank theories and how to generate them;
- An article surveying conspiracy theories;

- An article on what I call “creative sociology” in science fiction, originally commissioned for the Westercon 44 program book;
- The *Royal Swiss Navy Handbook*;

Plus drafts of a crank theory of my own, of a critique of how fans run conventions, and of Canadian fanhistory in the 1980s.

At this point I thought I should get real and get a life.

One of the most judgmental things I have written in fanhistories, and keep writing, is that some fan activities were not plans for success. Well, neither were my own ideas of budgeting. If there is any strength to the *Rich Dad, Poor Dad* and “Millionaire Mind” programs, there are better ways to make and save money than I knew about.

<i>Do you have any rubber walrus holders? – Ryan Hawe</i>
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## **Letters of Comment**

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*Murray Moore, May 20, 2008*

An unannounced award was presented during Keycon 25 ...  
 Through its first 24 years Keycon never has made official tribute to one of its volunteers, but on the occasion of the 25th Keycon, a Keycon volunteer was singled out as first among equals: Lyndie Bright.

I attended my first Keycon, I met Lyndie, and I was pleased to be able to congratulate her during the CUFF party that Lance hosted in the Keycon consuite.

Again, congratulations Lyndie!

I was in the air, on my way home when the business meeting happened so I have no news from the business meeting. Montreal was to bid for next year's Convention.

My only dismay during the weekend was the result in the fanzine category. “No Award” received more votes than *Opuntia* in the Fanzine category.

*((This surprises you?))*

---

*Eric Mayer, maywrite2@epix.net, October 17, 2008*

Downloaded and enjoyed *The Royal Swiss Navy Gazette*. Hope I found your right email address. I guess I got the title right this time. I seem to be having more "senior moments" recently, or maybe it is just that I am old enough to be afraid that they are senior moments. But 58 is hardly elderly, is it?

I don't have as much energy as I used to. I often feel too tired to work fast enough or to use all the time available to me. I'll listlessly browse the Internet then kick myself for not doing something creative instead. Probably there is a mental as well as a physical component. Whether a bit of depression or just fatigue from endlessly battling the same problems I have faced (and most of us face) my whole adult life who can say.

You say you "never got fanzine fandom." Me neither. I just don't fit. Never have.

*((Well, I "got" what I thought was fanzine fandom, but I didn't connect, somehow, with the Corflu/Potlatch gang.))*

I like to indulge myself by writing little personal vignettes. A lot of my inspiration and style comes from the old *New Yorker* writers like E.B. White and James Thurber and contemporaries of theirs like Robert Benchley. There's no reason that sort of thing should be entertaining to anyone else these days, and particularly not to readers who are interested in science fiction, sf fanzines, fan history and sf conventions. Nevertheless, back in the seventies and early eighties I was able to find within sf fandom quite a few people who shared my enthusiasm for such personal essays, distant as the subject matter was from fandom. Today far fewer fans have any interest in such essays and not many are willing to accept them as "fanzine writing." I think it is because fanzine fandom is shrinking, and the smaller it becomes the less diverse it becomes. The less diverse it becomes the fewer new members it gains, because those who don't exactly match the group's aesthetics are not readily accepted and naturally gravitate elsewhere and so the core continues to shrink. Thirty years ago fanzine fandom was still a rather cosmopolitan city but it seems well on the way to becoming a small town.

Why are some people – like me – drawn to fandom when they clearly feel they aren't really welcomed and don't fit in? In my case, I was grabbed by the idea of publishing little magazines and trading them and commenting back and forth, just for fun and to communicate – not to prove one was an \*Artist\* or as a step toward or substitute for professional publication. And I ran into enough others who shared my attitudes and did welcome me to make it worthwhile. Eventually I was disappointed to find out that I was only accepted by and interacting with a small minority of mostly out-of-the-mainstream fans. But I liked the people who I was in touch with a lot and enjoyed their work and so I continued (with a long lapse, true!) and often we complain to each other about fandom's faults!

That article you reprinted about introverts was interesting but it said introverts don't like to talk about themselves. I don't know about that. A lot of faanish introverts like me seem not to

mind writing about themselves. Is there are contradiction there?  
Can one be an introvert in the flesh but an extrovert online?

*((Easily. R. Graeme Cameron and I are less comfortable in face-to-face settings than typing online.))*

You have some terrific definitions there, along with the insight that many words don't really mean anything. "Fandom" is pretty vague. It strikes me that what people usually mean when they say "fandom" is my friends and I, and perhaps those of whom we approve, with maybe the caveat that the group engages in "fanac" which is defined as whatever my friends and I say it is, and not including anything we don't accept as fitting the definition. I like the term I first encountered – fanzine fandom – because it contains some sort of description of what activity might be involved or at least from what activity it evolved.

*WAHF: Mike Glycer ("Wow. And I would have been willing to wait even longer for this cherce slab of anti-American nonsense"),  
David "Murdock" Malinski, Felicity Walker*

*Stop stealing my narwhals! – Ashton Green*

## **Royal Swiss Navy Position Papers**

(#127) At this time of year it occurs to me that Santa Claus must have invented the world's first franchise, or at least the earliest form of general staff principles. It's simply impossible for one man, or manlike being, to deliver presents all over the world in one night, however few the good little girls and boys may be. As the original St. Nicholas transmogrified into Father Christmas, the logistical challenges must have increased to the point where he had to organize delegates.

Why didn't my folks provide this explanation when I was a kid? It's simple and obvious.

(#256) One of the more interesting gangs in the game "Super-Heroes of Hoboken" is the Anti-Vandals, who roam around at night fixing abandoned cars. I want to suggest that an initial RSN activity could be roaming around on weekends, voluntarily picking up trash on streets and greenspaces.

(#333) Nobody was really enthusiastic about getting into RSN Marine costumes and organizing a march in Vancouver on April Fool's Day – à la the zombie walks organized in several cities – but it may be time for me to list some RSN commemorative days of the year, starting with Emperor Norton Day. Emperor Norton

Day, for no reason I can remember, is February 9. Maybe I can find other silly commemorative days, like International Turnip Tossing Day, or Goat Marriage Month, or the masses of obscure and preposterous saints.

*Before there were Snakes on a Plane  
There were Eels on a Hovercraft!  
- Ryan Hawe*

## ***Newslike Messages***

### *Ben Stein Gets Silly*

In an anti-evolution documentary called *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, Nixon-speechwriter-turned-actor Ben Stein said that in his opinion, science leads to killing, like the Holocaust.

“The last time any of my relatives saw scientists telling them what to do they were telling them to go to the showers to get gassed...and that’s where science – in my opinion – that’s where science leads you.”

This is something of a surprise coming from the host of the game show “Win Ben Stein’s Money”, which rewarded knowledge and hyped the intelligence of Stein and his contestants – or from the spokesman for ClearEyes eyedrops, which, though promising to change one’s eye colour from red to white, were evidently not sufficiently reminiscent of Dr. Josef Mengele to cause Stein to turn down the gig.

(forwarded by Felicity Walker, 02 May 2008)

*He’s a Midnight Golfer  
And he keeps all his Lamps on a Submarine!  
- Ashton Green*

## ***Your August Horoscope***

(a new column appearing first in *BCSFazine* 424, Sept. 2008)

Ari (the Lion) - Your fingers staple pine nuts into everything you touch.

Toro (the Bull) - A little knowledge is a dangerous thing; have you considered the advantages of a really fine set of encyclopaedias?

Jiminy (the Cricket) - You are the Ayatollah of Confusion on the night of Divali.



Cancer (the Insidious Disease) - You will find what you are looking for in the last place where you look.

Leo (the Italian Gigolo) - As the bile slowly rises in my incandescent eluxulation, your mere presence has a calming effect on my rabies.

Virgin (the Record Store) - You will attend a party where strange customs prevail. After the convention, your flu-like symptoms will only cost you a week off of work.

Ophiuchus (the Snotty Bureaucrat) - You are very fat and stupid and wear a ridiculous hat which you should be thoroughly ashamed of.

Liberal (the Amoral Power-Seeking MP) - Soon you may experience interesting times. Hope your emergency kit is fully stocked.

Skorpius (the Stock Alien Villain) - How can I help but use your eyes as a means for self-asphyxiation?

Sagittarian (the Bronze Age Bodybuilder) - You may receive all that you deserve in this life. Are you prepared?

Caprica (the Lost Colony) - You will discover there is no truth to the rumour that you are being paid to deny.

Aquarelle (the Painting Kit) - You may come to the attention of those in high places. Have you taken appropriate safeguards?

Pissy (the Girlfriend) - I can't listen to you when you're like this. When you come back to your senses, then call me. Not before!

## ***Fan News***

The 2008 Aurora Awards:

Best Long-Form Work in English / Meilleur livre en anglais: *The New Moon's Arms*, Nalo Hopkinson (Warner)

Meilleur livre en français / Best Long-Form Work in French: *Cimetière du musée*, Diane Boudreau (du Phoenix)

Best Short-Form Work in English / Meilleure nouvelle en anglais: "Like Water in the Desert," Hayden Trenholm (*Challenging Destiny* #24) (novelette)

Meilleure nouvelle en français/ Best Short-Form Work in French: "Sur la plage des épaves," Laurent MacAllister (*Solaris* 164)

Best Work in English (Other) / Meilleur ouvrage en anglais (Autre): *Under Cover of Darkness*, Julie E. Czerneda & Jana Panicia, eds., DAW

Meilleur ouvrage en français (Autre) / Best Work in French  
(Other): No Nominations  
Artistic Achievement / Accomplissement artistique: Lar deSouza  
(*On Spec* Winter 2007, *Parsec* Spring/Summer 2007)  
Fan Achievement (Fanzine) / Accomplissement fanique (Fanzine):  
No Award / Pas de prix  
Fan Achievement (Organizational) / Accomplissement fanique  
(Organisation): Penny Lipman, masquerades  
Fan Achievement (Other) / Accomplissement fanique (autre):  
Paul Bobbitt, editor, *The Voyageur*

Proceedings of the Canadian SF Association meeting:

MOVED THAT:

Article II...Section 5: Fan Achievement:

*.....A: Fan Achievement (publication): For a Canadian fanzine or fannish newsletter or amateur publication relating to science fiction and fantasy fandom published at least once during the previous calendar year. Publications may be either hard copy/paper or electronic. Club publications, such as clubzines, are not eligible for this award.*

BE AMENDED TO:

*Article II.....A: Fan Achievement (publication): For a Canadian fanzine or fannish newsletter, amateur publication or blog or other type of publication relating to science fiction and fantasy fandom published either in hard copy/paper or electronically at least once during the previous calendar year. Club publications, such as clubzines, are not eligible for this award. This award is open to a wide range of fannish publications in all media.*

Moved by Clint Budd and seconded by Robert Sawyer Carried +#  
11 -# 0

I thought this measure was somewhat beside the point, but you can make up your own mind.

The next Aurora Awards presentation, in 2009, will be at Anticipation, the Montreal Worldcon.

CUFF, the Canadian Unity Fan Fund, is now in the hands of Lance Sibley (of Toronto fandom).



VCon 33: On the first weekend in October, my lack of funds meant I was not well prepared for attending VCon 33. This is also at least the second time I was ill, on the convention weekend. (It started as a sore throat, which terrified me because I have had strep throat twice. A friend really did have strep throat that weekend and couldn't attend.) I didn't even try to attend programming or see the guests of honour, I just hung out in Hospitality, and attended the room parties (the few there were), and tried to catch up with friends. I had to give it a pass on Sunday (the only day there were panels to interest me).



*(Palle Hoffstein, chair Danielle Stephens, and some pogue I don't know)*

If you think that sounds unenthusiastic, you're right. I don't want to be disrespectful of the experience and hard work of VCon committees; but even if I were feeling rich and healthy that

weekend, Vcons haven't offered me what I'm looking for, not for the last several years. (What am I looking for? Think about it.)

Some other fans seemed disappointed that writers and publishers got particular attention (there was a combined book-launch party for several of them in the hotel restaurant), while features such as graphic arts, upcoming movies, and so on were a lesser priority. (Jamtarts!)



*(Donna McMahon, Clint Budd, and Paul Carpentier at closing ceremonies)*

## ***Different Values of “Fandom”***

*(appearing as “The Trouble with Belgium” in BCSFAzine 425, Oct. 2008)*

In some years we have printed extra copies of *BCSFAzine* to distribute at VCon, and on such occasions I tried to include capsule descriptions of the clubs and conventions and other fan activities here. (And then I found out how incomplete and inaccurate my information was. Graeme's *WCSFAzine* is more plugged-in than I am.) Maybe another perspective is worth taking.

What are all the different interests that carry on under the name “fandom”? Without surfing the Web very long, you can find:

- Animation and graphic design artists
- Japanese Anime (and all that that entails)
- Comics and graphic novel fans
- Conrunners
- Costuming
- DIY streaming-video fans
- Fanhistory fans

Fantasy fans  
Fanzine fans  
Filk fans  
Gaming (from board to computer to live-action/role-playing games)  
Media (lumping together *Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, *Battlestar Galactica*, *Forever Knight*, *Supernatural*, *X-files*, pirates, *Lord of the Rings*, etc.)  
Science fiction fans (the few, the proud)  
Society for Creative Anachronism  
Writers' workshop fans

You already know what this means, that we have a lot of different fandoms going around. And you probably know my next point, that this is just normal, the *status quo*, for contemporary fans – but not for fans who got an earlier, different concept. What is that concept, you ask?

One fandom that's not listed here is “fannish” fandom. That referred specifically to a phase characterized by the humorous, even surreal writing both fans and university frosh would produce; hoaxes like UVic's War with Greenland, or the Witherspoon-Li letters to *BCSFazine*, or the “Secret Life of Robert Runte” fantasies in *Neology* about the Grey Eminence of Alberta fandom. All of this seemed to be the hallmark of some intelligent, high-spirited, creative minds. My preferred company.

I've been trying to popularize the “fannish” concept with Royal Swiss Navy activity proposals, like the proposal to mount a United Anarchist Collective party in time for the next election, a Royal Swiss Navy uniform parade on April Fool's Day, or at least an RSN room party at VCon.

VCon tends to offer space and programming to a variety of fandoms, which is why it gets called a “general-interest” SF convention. Variety is great. It means that you should be able to find your kind of company ... your community. VCon also retains what I just assume is the focus of an SF convention: written SF. Today, though, we have to call this a “literary” convention, as distinct from the conventions held by and for the majority of fandoms.

What I'm driving at is, we still have a high proportion of fans who learned of fandom as *one* interest group, not many; a subculture of *readers*, not overwhelmingly of media fans; and – here's my deal – a *community*, however geographically distributed. Maybe fandom really was like this, once upon a time.

May I know, please, where to find a community of friends with active minds? Original minds? Fannish minds? I'm not

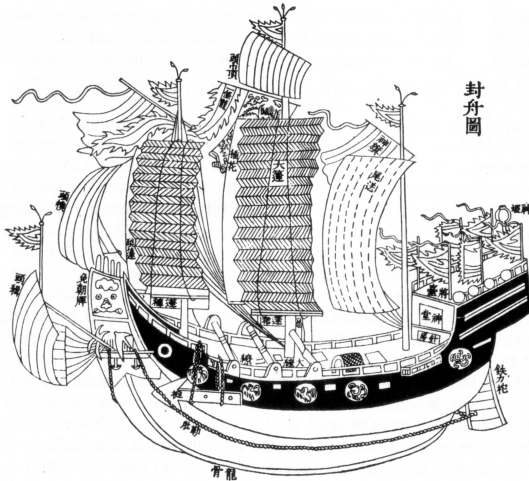
dissing other kinds of fandom, I'm just asking you (once again) where my kind is.

Let's be frank. Media, comics and games *don't* present really original ideas, but science fiction and fantasy motifs that have been done to death a couple or five generations ago. Fandom as we know it *doesn't* deal with true novelty very well: people latch onto one thing, and want to hang onto the same old trip forever; no wonder that "fanfiction" now means slavishly writing in your favourite media story universe, not an original one.

The *RSN Gazette* and the *RSN Handbook* have gotten a few laughs, but ... My campaign to promote fannishness hasn't worked. I guess I don't have that charisma thing.

So: What are *your* suggestions for making our fandom more fannish?

## ***Cheng Ho Discovers America!***



by Taral Wayne

A little while ago I wrote a short piece on a coin from Kabul in Afghanistan, a crossroad of the Silk Road. One of the odder details that emerged from my researching this coin's background was that the Chinese had written about the kings of Kabul that struck it. What they said was little important. What intrigued me was that the reach of the Chinese spread so far west.

Central Asia is certainly a curious place, and overlooked by most people. To the casual reader the vast tracts of sand and

rock between the Byzantines and Tang and Sung dynasties were a no-man's land of nomadic tribes and weary camel trains. But in fact it was a quilt of small kingdoms and city-states – Kashan, Samarkand, Tashkent, Lhasa – and those nomads periodically created vast federations that overran the surrounding civilizations. Much about the numerous peoples who inhabited the heart of Asia is still unknown and what is known is nevertheless the subject of contentious debate.

But central Asia seems to have been more a mystery to Europe than to the Far East. In the 7<sup>th</sup> century enormous armies clashed in Asian deserts. The rising Islamic empire had met the distant Chinese civilization, and fought over the fate of passes in mountain ranges that no-one in Dark Ages Europe knew the name of... much less where they were, or how they mattered to the balance of power.

One reader of my original article commented that the reach of the Chinese exceeded even the Pamirs and Hindu Kush. He reminded me of the voyages of the eunuch admiral, Cheng Ho. (Alternately, Zheng He.)

During the reign of the kings of Kabul, Sung China dwarfed any empire in the West, or the Hind. Whereas the Byzantines built a wall around Constantinople, the Sung stood guard on a wall around China. A vast network of cargo-laden canals crisscrossed the Middle Kingdom. Gunpowder had been invented and already primitive canon and rockets had appeared.

Some centuries later, starting in 1405, the Ming emperor Zhu Di mounted several gigantic maritime expeditions to explore the China Seas and Indian Ocean. His “admiral” was half Arab, and a eunuch, but nevertheless given the use of hundreds of ships larger than anything in medieval Europe, and command over tens of thousands of men to crew them. Not to mention that untold wealth in silk, gold, spices and tea were put at his disposal to sweeten diplomacy and spark trade.

The several voyages of Cheng Ho's monster fleet visited the Philippines, touched port in Indochina, probably came within sight of the north Australian shore, penetrated the Sumatra Straits and entered the Bay of Bengal. On successive voyages the fleet sailed up the Persian Gulf, rounded Arabia and stopped off at the port of Jidda in the Red Sea. From the vicinity of Mecca, Ho sailed south along the African shore, touching at Mogadishu and Mombasa, and may have reached as far as Madagascar. Cheng Ho was the greatest executive-explorer in history before Prince Henry the Navigator of Portugal.

Columbus had not even been born yet.

And then it came to an abrupt end in 1433.

The maps were burned, the journals kept were discarded, the immense ocean-going ships were broken up where they lay in their yards. Everything possible was done to ensure that the very memory of the expeditions of Cheng Ho were officially forgotten. Of course, no such effort is ever entirely successful, and the record wasn't entirely expunged. A great deal about the voyages can still be reconstructed, and we know much about the maritime technology that made them possible. But how could such a thing happen?

It would be as though we in the 20<sup>th</sup> century had gone to the moon, not once, but several times, and then turned our back on the adventure so thoroughly that it would take a major initiative to re-acquire a capability we had lost a couple of generations ago.

\*ahem\*

Characteristic Chinese isolation and self-absorption were to blame, my correspondent implied, in particular an emperor jealous of his servant's success.

The situation was a bit more complicated than just a jealous emperor. For one thing, the emperor Zhu Di died. His heir was a more modest ruler, not given to megalomaniac projects to aggrandize his own divinity, as Zhu Di had been. He was concerned for the poor of his realm, and the burden of taxes they paid. Within his court policies changed, and the balance of power shifted.

In effect, Chen Ho's expeditions lost out in a palace intrigue between the "Mandarin" party and the "Palace Eunuch" party. One group criticized the expeditions as a waste of money – who cared what barbarian nations there were on the far side of the world. They wanted the money spent on "useful" projects to benefit the kingdom, in this case, the considerable expense of construction of new and longer canals. Profits before curiosity would be one way of putting it.

It's actually possible to project the Chinese politics of the 15<sup>th</sup> century into our own day. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century we've seen one party deplore the waste of money on space exploration, money that might have been used to build schools and hospitals, or reclaim the environment. But like most parallels, they won't hold up long. In our case, the "profit" motive is seen on the side of exploration, or curiosity, while it's the do-gooders who are on the "useful" side.

There are numerous amusing parallels, in fact.

In making a list of characteristics of the "Eunuch" party we see the Republicans:



- an entrepreneurial class
- business opportunists
- new money (not part of the old establishment)
- imperialist ambitions
- open (free) trade with barbarians
- “trickle-down” economics, privatized interests
- crony-style corruption

Likewise a list of characteristics of the “Mandarin” or “Confucian” party who serve well as the Ming version of the Democrats:

- privileged upper class
- status quo
- old money (entrenched interests)
- domestic reform
- regulated economy
- noblesse oblige
- old-boy style corruption

In any case, rather like America at various times, China turned its back on the world after 1433, deeming it populated by various towel-heads, gooks, and mud-people of no interest. I wonder if I don't prefer *that* China to the one that thinks the time has come for it to resume its proper place as leader of the world. Implicit in their boasts and ambition is that the rest of us will have to step back and acknowledge the supremacy of their supposed 5,000-year-old culture.

By the way. That's simply propaganda that Westerners seem gullible enough never to question. Whose culture isn't 5,000 years old, in one sense or another?

In 3000 BC the Chinese were a pre-literate, pre-bronze age people wearing skins, just like pretty much everyone else's ancestors in the third millennium BC. The earliest, Shung, dynasty would not appear in China for another 1500 years. It's doubtful that the formative Chinese language could even be recognized in Beijing today. If anything, the Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations of 3000 BC were far ahead of the barbarians living on the plains of the upper Yellow River at the time.

There are two books on the subject of Cheng Ho's voyages. I recommend *When China Ruled the Seas* by Louise Levathes. (Simon & Schuster, 1994) The work is rock solid and well documented – it's accepted by scholars everywhere.

The other book is *1421, the Year China Discovered the World* and after a good start turns into a crank work. By the end, the

author, Gavin Menzies, has the Chinese discovering practically every corner of the world... but manage to overlook Europe entirely.

Naturally not Europe. If the Chinese had sailed up the Thames or Seine in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, there would be copious written accounts in European literature. You can imagine Columbus would have had little trouble finding funds to follow in Chinese tracks. And Shakespeare, a couple of generations later, might have written at least *one* play on the subject. Of course, if Chinese discoveries are carefully limited to California, Australia, Antarctica, Newfoundland, South Africa, the Congo, and Peru, the problem doesn't arise. What records would be left by the pre-literate inhabitants of the New World, black Africa and Oceania? How convenient that the Chinese discovered only places they are *known from written accounts to have visited*, or places where there can be *none*.

Other than that suspect circumstance, the author builds supposition upon supposition that begs scepticism. Menzies argues rather in this fashion:

*A current only 100 miles off the usual trade routes would naturally sweep a fleet all the way across the Indian Ocean. If it went around the Horn of Africa just right, the fleet would enter the trade wind belt and have an almost automatic passage of the Atlantic. If they sighted land first at Manhattan, they could have sailed up the Hudson River and discovered the Iroquois. From there a trip up the Great Lakes would bring you to a series of portages into the prairies, where guides could take Chinese explorers to the Rockies easily. From there to founding San Francisco is a small step... etc.*

It's rather like building a tree house out on the slenderest twig of the furthest branch of a tree. Each step makes it more and more likely the entire structure of speculation will collapse of its own weight.

Naturally, with its more ambitious, if unsubstantiated scope, *1421* seems to have caught the public imagination. But if you prefer Gibbon to Sprague de Camp, don't waste your time on this book. It's not even a ripping good yarn. There isn't a single snake goddess.

Still, it's fascinating to speculate. What if Cheng Ho's expeditions had continued? Might there have been a mighty Ming trade empire in the Indian Ocean when Europeans arrived there in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, leaving them virtually excluded?

Could Elizabeth's privateers have waylaid Chinese merchant ships on their way to Nanking or Shanghai after leaving Lisbon and Cadiz?

Or might Columbus have been met by Chinese-speaking ambassadors of Ming colonies in the New World? He could hardly have claimed America for the king of Spain.

What would we call Columbus Day do you suppose?

## **Runes**

By Garth Spencer

A few months ago, a conversation at a BCSFA meeting about writing systems led to a breakdown of communication. I was maintaining that medieval runes not only served as a sort of alphabet, but the individual symbols could be used as ideographs on their own. The hostess brought me a volume to correct my impressions – which had nothing to do with the Norse runes I was talking about. I should have been more specific.















The short version of this story is that, even long after Europe was Christianized, some Northern Europeans used a sort of alphabet that was vaguely associated with paganism, with the Norse and Danes and Goths, and with folk magic. As symbols, alone or in combination, runes were used for calendars, for divination and in talismans.

That said, we can now go into details. Strictly speaking, an “alphabet” is not only a set of signs for the sounds that make up words; “alphabet” is specifically applied to the Latin, Greek, Hebrew and Arabic scripts, to the symbols used for Russian, or Coptic, or Armenian or Amharic – in fact, for a host of scripts descending from ancient Punic – all of which start with similar sequences. The Latin A, B, C, D, etc. are mirrored by the Greek Alpha, Beta, Gamma, the Hebrew Aleph, Beth, Gimel ... and so it goes. (Incidentally the Hebrew names for the letters are recognized as words for “ox”, “house”, and so on.)

Runes follow a different sequence, usually called a “futhark”

...

Ɱ	Feoh	Ɱ	Perth
ⱦ	Ur	ⱦ	Eoh
ⱦ	Thorn	ⱦ	Elhaz
ⱦ	As	ⱦ	Sigel
ⱦ	Rad	ⱦ	Tyr

	Ken		Beorc
	Gyfu		Ehwaz
	Wyn		Man
	Hagal		Lagu
	Nyd		Ing
	Is		Odal
	Jera		Dagaz

There have been different versions of Norse runes at different times and in different places, not only with variant forms but also with a different number of symbols, and with different names. The version shown above is the Elder Futhark, perhaps the earliest known form of the runes. The names of the runes – like the original names of letters in Hebrew – were taken from everyday objects or concepts, not all of them natural: “Feoh” was a word for cattle, “Urs” a word for the aurochs (now extinct), “Hagal” for hail. Also like the earliest alphabets, the runes are very angular, adapted to carving into wood or stone.

A longer futhark developed in Anglo-Saxon Britain; a shorter sequence, the “Younger Futhark”, developed in medieval Scandinavia. As late as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, runes were used for writing, for ciphers, for calendar reckoning and for folk magic. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century yet another runic system was dreamed up by a German mystic, and co-opted by the German fascist movement in the 1930s.

Come to think of it, a lot of fringe culture from the 1930s was co-opted by the German fascist movement. Neo-fascism keeps popping up again in our generation. What I call “fringe culture”, including crop-circle theories and pyramid power and astrology and, well, rune lore keeps making a comeback, too. Without looking terribly hard I keep finding books on runes, on the same shelves where you find astrology guides and numerology texts, palmistry, witchcraft courses, and a thesis arguing that Atlantis was a Neanderthal stronghold.

(This is not to say that someone sporting runic tattoos or writing runic graffiti is likely to be a skinhead, anymore than a member of the Bush administration is likely to suffer from Alzheimer’s, just because they work in the same building as the late President Reagan.)

Runes, like Tarot cards, are prone to evoke a sense of cryptic, potent symbolism. (At least, crude geometric designs and symbols of basic, common experiences have that effect on me. Must be something in the limbic system.) I want to call this “iconic” even though it’s a misnomer.

The fact of life, however, is that *any* arbitrary set of symbols can develop “iconic” significance for people, in my sense; just give it enough time and reinforcement. It has been traditional to claim that Tarot cards are some cosmic, timeless, Platonic powers *in themselves*, not just as symbols; the same thing has been claimed of runes, Hebrew letters, and Sanskrit writing, even of their very sounds. It may not matter.

The folk-magic aspect of runes combines the notion of runes as signs for Cosmic Values, and the notion that you can somehow divine character, foretell the future, or cast spells by rearranging the signs. From the days of Viking raids to the present, people have been casting runes for divination, writing runes in rings, and combining runes in talismans for health and good fortune.

The conclusion of this is obvious: we have here an Unregulated Industry, and it is past time to call for professional standards of runecraft, and government regulation. It only remains to consider whether this is a Federal or a Provincial jurisdiction.

We could also strike a Royal Commission to ask whether the archetypes of First Nations monumental art bear “iconic” significance. This calls for further study.

## ***Fanzines Received***

Since I took so long to get this together, I am basically reacquainting myself with the state of fanzine fandom.

*Alexiad* 42 (received via email in text format), December 2008, c/o Lisa & Joseph Major, 1409 Christy Avenue, Louisville, KY 40204-2040, USA, [jtmajor@iglou.com](mailto:jtmajor@iglou.com) , If I were reading more thoroughly the fanzines I receive, I would get a good deal of benefit from Joseph’s numerous analytical book reviews.

*Burnaby Writers’ Society Newsletter*, November-December 2008, Burnaby Writers’ Society, 6584 Deer Lake Ave., Burnaby, BC V5G 3T7. What it is. Not a fanzine, really, but one of the things an aspiring local writer will collect.

*Chunga* #14, April 2008, Edited by Andy ([fanmailaph@aol.com](mailto:fanmailaph@aol.com)), Randy ([fringefaan@yahoo.com](mailto:fringefaan@yahoo.com)), and Carl ([heurihermilab@gmail.com](mailto:heurihermilab@gmail.com)). Please address all postal correspondence to 1013 North 36th Street, Seattle WA 98103, USA. Editors: please send three copies of any zine for trade. Great entertainment for those who like think pieces, like me.

*The Drink Tank* #193, Chris Garcia (on efanzines.com) – I take it this is his personalzine.

*File 770:154*, Mike Glycer (on efanzines.com) – North America's newszine of record.

*Littlebrook* #6, Jerry Kaufman & Suzanne Tompkins, (on efanzines.com) - a genzine from two Well-Known Fans. The editorial this issue starts with a retrospective look at the pure-quill Sense of Wonder stories in Kaufman's past readings, and links to several other ideas from there. Stu Shiffman links Sherlock Holmes stories to Westerns. Just two of the delights in this genzine.

*Nice Distinctions* #17, Arthur Hlavaty, Arthur D. Hlavaty, 206 Valentine Street, Yonkers, NY 10704-1814. hlavaty@panix.com. A witty personalzine and opinion zine, with a review this issue of another International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts, and some philosophical speculations brought on by Kurt Vonnegut, among other things.

*Opuntia* #66.3, December 2008, Dale Speirs (by mail), Box 6830, Calgary, AB T2P 2E7. Whole-numbered issues of *Opuntia* are "sercon", x.1 issues are reviewzines, x.2 issues are indexes, x.3 issues are apazines for FAPA, and x.5 issues are perzines. Dale promises a detailed report on the World Fantasy Convention of 2008 (in Calgary) in the following issue, and includes synopses of some interesting scientific papers.

*Phlizz 2*, Chuck Connor (on efanzines.com) – this is the first time I have seen a fanzine set up as a website, rather than an online emulation of a paper periodical. Why don't I do something like that?

*Space Cadet Gazette* #12, R. Graeme Cameron (on efanzines.com) – the reappearance in late 2008 of his long-dormant personalzine. My friend Graeme is a devotee of B-movies. Unsurprisingly, this issue is largely devoted to a long and detailed appreciation of the late Forrest J. Ackerman.

*Steam Engine Time* #9, December 2008, edited by Janine Stinson, (tropicsf at earthlink. net), PO Box 248, Eastlake, MI 49626- 0248 USA and Bruce Gillespie (gandc at pacific. net. au), 5 Howard St., Greensborough VIC 3088, Australia. *Steam Engine Time* is fascinating for someone like me – serious full-length papers about science fiction issues, such as an examination of the work of Michael Moorcock. I was particularly interested in the in-depth analysis of *Inferno*, by

Niven and Pournelle. Also fascinating is the colophon: “All material in this publication was contributed for one- time use only, and copyrights belong to the contributors.” I am beginning to wonder what is going to happen to this “fannish copyright” today, not only in the context of Web publishing, but in the situation where most fans don’t know fannish practice.

*Visions of Paradise* #136, Bob Sabella (efanzines) VoP is a mix of personalzine and genzine that I haven’t quite figured out. This issue starts with a retrospective look at some themes in Sabella’s past readings.

*WCSFAzine* #16, December 2008, R. Graeme Cameron (on efanazines.com) – As opposed to BCSFAzine, the club newsletter I put out, WCSFAzine is the newsletter of the local registered society which oversees Vcon. This issue features major sections on fan news, fanhistory, fanzine fandom, “Super Science Stuff” (reprints of the Ask Mr. Science column), media news, con news, pro news, and letters.