

# SWIM



#24

Summer 2014

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SWILL is published quarterly (Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter) along with an annual every February - in other words, five times per year.

SWILL

Issue #24 Summer 2014

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# **Editorial: Star Trek Sux**

**Neil Williams**

Yes, I did say that. Just to make it clear (especially for those Trekkies with an overabundance on fat intermixed with their brain cells), I will say it again; Star Trek sucks! In fact, Star Trek sucks shit!

There, now I have done it - I will most certainly face the Wrath of the Trekkies. Not that I really care; SHRUG, they're only Trekkies...

Oh, and don't get all, but I'm a Trekker not a Trekkie... Look, if you actually believe that you must attack any criticism of this media franchise, that no negative words must ever, EVER be spoken/written about Star Trek, then you ARE a Trekkie. For you, this television programme has become something akin to a political philosophy/religion -- a worldview that must be defended at all costs from all detractors, perhaps even unto death... This also means that you are beyond reason, beyond dialogue - and from the Trekkie POV anybody who has not drank the Kool-Aid and bought into the belief that all things Star Trek are sacred is Other and The Enemy. You will hate everything that is said in this issue (and you will do so without actual thought or any reasoned reflection).

For my second heresy; Star Trek (in all its forms) is just a media franchise centred on what was just a television programme that first aired almost fifty years ago. It IS only a television show...

What are the major strengths of Star Trek? Three of the more common defences of Star Trek that Trekkies usually trot out are, that in Star Trek there is (are):

- actual scientific speculation
- serious subject matters
- an optimistic future

There are obviously more than these three, but this is enough material to deal with for purposes of this editorial.

In Star Trek there is actual scientific speculation. Yes; and no. It all depends upon the context being used. In comparison

with its USA television contemporaries (*Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, *Lost in Space*, *The Time Tunnel*, *The Invaders*, *Land of the Giants*) then, yes, *Star Trek* is superior in its scientific literacy and speculation; superior, but not excellent, and certainly not perfect. However, if the level of actual science in your competitors, e.g. *Lost in Space*, is abysmal, being superior to them doesn't make you wonderful, it just places you above being a scientific illiterate. Face the facts, in all incarnations of *Star Trek*, there remains a substantial amount of science and technology that is pure baloneyum, i.e. pure unadulterated bullshit; but, as long as it is not so absolutely, outrageously wrong or it does not require over a minute of techno babble to create the illusion that it could be considered to be plausible, we let it go. This does not mean that *Star Trek* is "hard science" or on the forefront of scientific and technological speculation, it only means that it is somewhat more scientific than its American television contemporaries.

Now, if we compare *Star Trek* to print medium science fiction of the late 1960s, it doesn't look superior at all. It is simply military (albeit a mild variety) space opera, good space opera, but space opera nevertheless.<sup>1</sup> It is a 30% Royal Navy of the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and 60% the American Navy during World War II and 10% the American Navy of the 1960s. Oh there are aliens, i.e. different cultures, most of whom are humanoid and can interbreed with humans,<sup>2</sup> but most are not that different from our cultures - and *Trek* never does (being on broadcast television) create cultures that are analogues of some of the more different cultures (for example, cultures where homosexuality is the norm) that have existed or are still extant on our planet. And then, there are the alien cultures that are just mirrors of Earth history - allowing for the use of pre-existing costumes and sets - such as Romanworld, Naziworld, Gangsterworld, Aboriginalworld, Westernworld, etc. What ever happened with the First Federation - which was older and more technologically advanced than the United Federation of Planets - but only appears in one episode in all of the *Trek* series?<sup>3</sup> What of the many other near-equal to the United Federation of Planets species that also have a single

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<sup>1</sup> *Star Wars* - the other megafranchise - is fair to poor space opera.

<sup>2</sup> Yes, I am aware that this was supposedly sorted in a *Next Generation* episode - but it is a weak solution in my opinion and has holes (except for the believers).

<sup>3</sup> Yes, I do know that this species was further developed in novels and computer games - I am just focusing on televised *Trek* (the medium that the franchise was created in).

walk-on episode and are never heard of again?<sup>4</sup> And finally there are the adversary aliens in the original series - the Klingons and the Romulans - or should I say the Soviets and the Chinese vs the Federation aka the USA.

Look, if this was a story or serialised novel published in a SF magazine back in 1968, it would have been criticised as being hack space opera - even by most Analog readers of the period (though not by the most "rah-rah USA" military SF readers of Analog). While, the later series (I am going to be really, really kind here and not even make mention of the Trek films, any of them) do attempt to rationalise the canon (when they are not violating established canon) and do attempt to make the Federation appear to be more pluralistic and more democratic and less militaristic, Trek still does not come close to matching the good to excellent in print SF.

Star Trek dealt with serious subject matters. Sort of... Yes, we have the first people of colour in positive roles on USA television in the original series and we have the first inter-racial kiss on USA television, and so on. But were there actual serious problems examined in the television programmes? Yes, there were at times. And where those problems handled seriously; most of the time, they were not. Usually, Star Trek approached these problems as fables and morality plays. And I have no actual problem with that; there are strict limits to the 50 minute (or less) episodic broadcast television format. Star Trek, especially the original series, does its moral fables and cautionary tales well for television of the time period, and I do not dispute that. I do dispute the Trekkie notion that those televised morality plays are the pinnacle, the absolute zenith of political/social/philosophical thought on these problems and issues. They are not.

Did Trek bring these issues and problems to the general USA television audience? Yes, it did to some extent. Are they the only television drama to do so? No, they were not. Did they do it better than other television programmes; in regards to the original series, sometimes. However, the closer we get to the present, the less that is so. Star Trek series have always been made for broadcast television and subject to broadcast television constraints - cable and digital television network dramas can deal in far more depth with controversial issues and social problems than what is permitted on "the USA public airwaves".

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

Star Trek does raise the social and political problems of the day (for the time period when each series was being produced) but as episodic television, it cannot penetrate these issues as well as a limited serial (e.g. Orphan Black) is capable of doing - if they choose to do so.

Star Trek presents an optimistic future. That really depends upon your worldview, it really, really does. I am only going to focus on the original series, as it is this series that sets the foundation for the Star Trek happy-happy future. The thing is, how positive is it?

Well, you have a sort-of nice, just-so fantasy of a prosperous, harmonious world, with racial/ethnic equality (some gender equality), and no internal social/political conflicts. In essence it is an American, 1960s middle class, stepford future (the sub-text of conformity is strongly present), that still contains financial inequality, is capitalist, is militaristic, and while within humankind there is a higher degree of equality than in the mid-20th and early 21st Centuries, there remains an vertical mosaic<sup>5</sup> regarding other species (with humankind on the top). United Earth and the United Federation of Planets are nothing more than the United States of Earth and the United States of the Galaxy. Oh, and although humans are no longer fighting each other, that doesn't mean that we are without war -- no, we are constantly at war, usually small wars, with other species (just as the USA has almost always been at war during most of that nation's history). Plus, and here is where Trek canon is inconsistent, there have been two World Wars since WW II (the Eugenics War is sometimes referred to as WW III and WW III sometimes referred to as WW IV -- nevertheless, both are world wars and all that such global conflicts entail).

True, this is all modified in the later series, with energy so inexpensive that it isn't charged for and replicator post-scarcity economies. However, there is still a high level of

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<sup>5</sup> For Americans who are probably unfamiliar with this term, the vertical mosaic was coined by the Canadian sociologist John Porter in his examination of Canadian society in the mid 1960s. Porter describes an ethnic/racial "pecking order" that existed -- and continues to exist -- within Canada that has evolved over time. The Canadian vertical mosaic is flatter today than it was in 1965, which was flatter than it was in 1900. But, those who form our elites, those who have, on average, greater opportunities, tend (in 2014 Canada) to be those of Western European descent, with other ethnic/racial groups ranking below this group. This also plays out in Star Trek where humans are the species at the top of the mosaic, then the Vulcans, etc. down the chain.

conformity and militarism. And humankind has been perfected (I guess that some aspects of the Eugenics Wars did get passed down into the mainline of the human genome) which, to me, sounds more sinister than positive. And it isn't all that democratic, either. Military ethics trump social ethics and the Federation Assembly appears to be little more than a parody of the UN General Assembly and subordinate to Starfleet. Beyond the surface, this is not a positive future in my opinion. It is a phoney future, which has a strong friendly fascist undercurrent. And this is but a brief, back of the envelope, dissection of Trek society...

I think that David Gerrold said it best, "Star Trek is the McDonalds of science fiction". That about sums it up. And most people agree, McDonalds food sucks; so does Star Trek.

# **Thrashing Trifecta: Plucking the Great Bird of the Galaxy**

**Neil Williams**

Wherein the editor does continue his heretical acts upon Star Trek, compounding his Trek-crimes and thus increasing the odds that he shall be attacked by anger-frenzied Trekkies at the next SF convention that he attends that has a strong media SF programming track (however, given that the average Trekkie weighs at least 115 kilos -- and most of that is not muscle -- I am relatively confident that, even at my age, I can out-run them)...

For my next diabolical deed, I shall turn my gaze to none other than Eugene "Gene" Roddenberry aka The Great Bird of the Galaxy. Perhaps it would be wise to express some trepidation regarding my intended plan to trash a personage who is revered as being at least a Trekkie "saint" if not the Trekkie "Supreme Being", but I won't. At the same time, as somebody who never knew the man, who never had any dealings with him, etc. I have no strong emotions involved concerning Gene Roddenberry; I have no axe to grind, nor scores to settle, truths to reveal, nada, zip, nothing. All I intend to do here is to point out the fact that Roddenberry's human failings outweigh his alleged "sacredness" and to deny his canonisation and/or deification -- not that that will sway any Trekkies out there.

**Primary Heresy:** Gene Roddenberry was just a man, an ordinary human being, no wiser, no more brilliant, no more noble than the majority of us 7.2 billion who currently inhabit the planet.

**Secondary Heresy:** Any overarching vision that can be attributed solely to this one man, Gene Roddenberry, was (as discussed in the Editorial of this issue) a hodgepodge of not very realistic wishful-thinking; a Pollyanna melange of sanitised 1960s counterculture tropes, middle-class American norms, and rose-coloured, fairy-glamour, just-so projections that are a patina or veneer that hides, upon actual reflection, a darker societal structure. **Sub-Heresy:** of course, Star Trek was created not as great art, but as a throw-away commodity (as are most television fictional programmes). Just like fast food, it is the initial taste that matters, not the nutritional content -- similarly for

Star Trek, the vision is to be consumed and actual thought is not required. Roddenberry was not a good philosopher, nor a good sociologist, nor a good futurologist (or even a good writer) - though he could be viewed as a good, not above average or excellent, television/film producer (and even then, he had failures intermingled with his successes).

**Tertiary Heresy:** Complementing my Primary Heresy, there is ample evidence that Gene Roddenberry was not just an ordinary human being, but that he was also not a very good ordinary human being. Well, he was a television producer for USA broadcast network television; while there may, just may, be some saints amidst this peer group, they are very, very rare (and Roddenberry was not one of them). A brief list of his failings would be: he was a womaniser, unfaithful husband, may have committed sexual assault against one of the female cast members on the original series, was an absentee parent, occasionally stole material from writers, manipulated contracts to deprive actors, writers, and composers from receiving the full royalties/residuals due to them, required actors to provide him a "cut" of any outside work they did as a Star Trek character, and made outrageous, false claims that served to build the inflated effigy of the god-man Roddenberry.

Since the death of his second wife Majel Barrett-Roddenberry, there have been several "tell-all" books that have been published by Trek insiders (and others) -- so don't just take my word for it (though take the Trek memoir books by Shatner with a kilo of salt -- these are ghost-written anyway). Roddenberry, when alive, was also very inconstant on the version of the tales he told about Trek. When not speaking to the faithful, Roddenberry does state that he drew inspiration for Star Trek from A. E. van Vogt's *Voyage of the Space Beagle*, Eric Frank Russell's *Men, Martians, and Machines*, C. S. Forester's Horatio Hornblower novels, and the film *Forbidden Planet*. But, when speaking at Trek conventions, there are no outside influences or inspiration, Star Trek emerges whole from Roddenberry's mind and he is the sole, singular creative force behind the series.

Another great inconsistency, which is very well documented (so well documented that I shouldn't have to mention it), centres on the episode *The City on the Edge of Forever*. According to Roddenberry; Harlan Ellison turned in a mediocre first draft script, that was going to be too expensive to shoot, had 'Scotty dealing drugs', and had to be re-written by Roddenberry to 'save the episode'. This is 100%, complete and absolute chickenshit rubbish -- i.e. it NEVER happened. Let me repeat, NEVER, EVER

happened. Again, check it out for yourself, the original teleplay was published in 1976 in *Six Science Fiction Plays* ed. Roger Elwood and again in 1996 by Ellison in *Harlan Ellison's City on the Edge of Forever*.<sup>6</sup> And yet, Roddenberry continued to tell this lie at every Trek convention he attended. And of course, Roddenberry's version continues to mouthed as the Dialogue by the numerous priests and priestesses of the Trek-cult and the lumpen-laity -- the Trekkies -- parrot the whole lie back as the Response in some kind of prayer to "Saint" Roddenberry.

Gene Roddenberry was a human being with human failings who was the producer for a television show called Star Trek; a programme that was good space opera for the time period, and that's all. Roddenberry was no saint, no bodhisattva, no demigod (though he had a huge ego and probably perceived himself as such, especially when being worshipped at Trek conventions) and all the claims of the Trekkies that he was "holy" (and still is) does not make it so.

And I will continue to speak these heresies, even if I should find myself before the Trekkie Inquisition...

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<sup>6</sup> In brief, very brief, because there are some people who are too lazy to check primary sources. All of the writing/production staff (Roddenberry included) loved Ellison's first draft of *City* -- nobody thought it was sub-standard or mediocre. It did run over budget, but not \$100,000 over budget as claimed by Roddenberry and his followers (probably more like \$50 - 60 k over). However, budgeting (unless one is a showrunner or writer-producer) is not a writer's responsibility; budgeting is what production staff does (in particular the line producer). In the original version of the script, the character Scotty, does not appear at all in the episode; yes, there is a crewman dealing drugs but it is not one of the main cast. Roddenberry never re-wrote the script at all (though he definitely had someone put in some stupid dialogue), the script was re-written at least twice by the series writing staff. Ellison himself, in the failed attempt to maintain the integrity of the original script while also pleasing Roddenberry and the network, did at least three re-writes of the script for no additional compensation. Roddenberry did not rewrite *City*, nor did he save it - he did have others do the re-writes and the final shooting script was of far lesser calibre than the original. If you want more details and are too cheap to buy the book, sign up for one month free trial on Scribd and actually read *Harlan Ellison's City on the Edge of Forever*.

## Pissing on a Pile of Old Amazings

A Modest Column by Lester Rainsford

A couple of weeks back Lester spotted, from the comfort of his seat on the Queen streetcar, a tall and gangly Spock hanging out on the corner. Sure, this was Queen West, and was Spock really that tall, after all he couldn't be taller than Kirk could he? The sheer ego-force of the universe should prevent Xthat possibility.

At one time, long ago, Lester would have been excercised by this. The world was new, mediafen gorged on Star Trek and Star Wars and The Empire Strikes Back were polluting skiffy as we knew it. Fat trekkies charged around convention centres, threatening all and sundry as if a herd of red-shirted buffaloe were on the stampede.

Now, things have changed. Lester sees no need to cling to the verities of the past. That he leaves for nostalgic truefen with delusiins of SMOFdom. Sometimes we need a reminder of how things are changed--see in a run-down TTC subway station all the empty boothettes for pay phones, and remember when pay phones were everywhere. Likewise, mediafen have gone off to their own mediacons (by and large). Star Wars brought forth Jar Jar Binks who is not to be unremembered. Skiffy has been taken over and eclipsed by fantasy,, and crappy extruded-product multivolume extreuded product at that. SF cons are now sedate, as all the greying ~~KANGAEEK~~ (hmm, 'con-goers') take their Geritol and are asleep by nine PM, assuming they have stayed awake through the panels in the first place. A bit of mayhem would not be a nuisance, it would be a welcome sign of life.

As for Spock on a stetccorner, if Lester's eyebrow rose in X the Vulcan manner, it was only the barest of twitches.

But Lester ~~XKKK~~ does have something co complain about. A couple of things.

First of all, there is the "Star Trek reboot" which contains what are allegedly junior versions of Kirk Spock et al. The movie is filled with gratuitous explosions. Worse, Kirk is played as some kind of ADD Mozart as seen in Amadeus, all shit-eating grin. Whatever kind of prodigy the young Kirk may have been, he wasn't this. Lester was disappointed that no ~~KKKK~~ Salieri was availabel to poison the grinning little shit. Lester wathed this on a cottage-sized old-style tube TV. The cottage owner is a Star Trek fan and loved the movie, hence Lester had to view it all the way through, no way out. Didn't loke. Wouldn't recommend.

Then there is Redshirts by Scalzi, which won some awards or something. Lester read this recently. The opening reminded X Lester of Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead. This apparently

occurred to a lot of other readers of taste and discernmenbt. There is a difference, though. Stoppard ends with Rosencarntz and Guildenstern bneing dead. Scalzi does not allow this logical outcome in Reshirts, starting with a goofy deux ex machina of this old guy hiding in the engineering spaces. Okay, the guy isn't a deus, but ex machina sure holds. Then, having written an all-round unsatisfactory engine, Scalzi throws in two codas that for some readers were the true apotheosis of this book.

Lester begs to disagree, having been left with the kind of raised eyebrows that an ersatz Vulcan didn't. As Scalzi tried so spin out the fix, the logic of the situation got murkier and murkier. Van Vogt would have handled it without any problems (it was Nazis from the secret moonbase you see) but Scalzi is no Van Vogt and Redshirts is no Slan. Frank Herbert came to mind, but that's unfair to Herbert.

What Scalzi pulled in the last part of Redshirts was a Piers Anthony. Anthony has a way of (sometimes) coming up with a good idea, but then not being arsed to figure out all the implications and dealing with the most obvious contradictions. So it starts interesting, and devolves by the end of the book into half-hearted armwaving.

Scalzi has been accused of being a facile and perhaps lazy writer, and Redshirts shows both bad aspects. Stoppard may be facile as well, but R&G are Dead is a clever tour-de-force, so the reader is motivated to ignore the facility. Not so with Redshirts which should have been one-third the length and ended badly for the redhirts, or at least existentially. Having taken on more than he can reasonably explain, Scalzi then gets laxy and does a terrible job of explaining just how this removed-by-time-and-space television show remote-control character patterning works, and how the redshirts can weasel out of their predicamenht. None of the logic that was presented made any sense whatsoever.

Stoppard didn't drag Shakespeare on stage to explain Hamlet, never mind give R&G anything but RXXX& an existential despair at being trapped in their roles with no exit.and Scalzi sholdn't have tried to drag Shakespear onstage either. What should have ended badly for the redshirts ends badly for Scalzi and awards voters. There's a lesson in there somewhere. Perhaps ASpock can figure it out; it's too much for Lester!

# **Flogging a Dead Trekkie!**

## **Violating the Taboo Norms of Science Fiction**

### **Part 7 of 8 – SF About SF**

**Neil Williams**

Malzberg's Taboos of Science Fiction or in my terminology, Norm Violations. These are story concepts and/or plots that if written -- if the norms are violated -- are unpublishable; no professional editor in the genre will touch these stories with a three-metre pole, and certainly would never, ever publish them.

#### **NORM VIOLATION SIX: SF About SF**

"Science fiction which questions science fiction; work which questions the assumptions of the category and speculates on the effect it might have upon its readership..."

I really don't have too much to say about this. There are very few professional published stories/novels written that break this norm. Is this because editors and readers view the violation of this norm as more than norm violation but as the actual breaking of a taboo? Possibly. It could also be that there is so much of this type of story that is published unprofessionally (for example, fan fiction and much of fan fiction).

One could say, for Trek fans (and others), that Scalzi's Redshirts is an example of the violation of this norm. (Lester has mentioned this novel in his column and I agree with his analysis, such as it is...). But this norm-breaking novel was professionally published -- which would support that this is not a norm violation. Then again, it is parodying Trek, which means that it is not questioning the assumptions of science fiction as a whole nor the impact the genre has on its readers/viewers, only

Star Trek. And there have been numerous Trek parodies over the decades and one feature film (Galaxy Quest) many of which were written by Trekkies themselves.

And the question has to be raised, is it possible to write a story today that criticises and/or calls into question the entire genre and those who consume the genre that would be seen as a norm violation by everybody, including editors and publishers? I can't answer that; I would speculate that it would be a difficult task to accomplish. Even the most anal retentive defender of all things Trek is not going to be upset by Redshirts (as Scalzi gives himself and the reader wiggle room as the novel is about a SF series that is a bad knock-off of Star Trek), because the Trekkie can pretend that Scalzi is not really questioning Star Trek itself. With so many mediums today in the genre and the proliferation of subgenres and sub-subgenres -- how can one write something that will enrage all of fandom enough that an editor/publisher will not publish it? I don't think that it is possible.

It is possible, to violate this norm for specific audiences, but not for the entire audience. Say, if within Redshirts it was made blatantly clear that this novel was all about Star Trek, Scalzi would have enraged the Trekkies and would be receiving hate-mail, etc. However, I doubt that fear of Trekkie wrath had anything to do with this decision though the potential of legal wrath from Viacom would have been a strong consideration.

With the vast diversity in the genre today and the massive amount of fan and fan fiction out there on the web and elsewhere that consistently does violate this norm (though not in professional publication), a writer is going to have to be very clever and very original for such a story to be published. Otherwise, the editor is just going to go, "Meh, I read something with a similar idea on a website last year (poorly written, but the same idea)." And they will pass on the story, but not because it broke a norm.

So, what about my story? It is a noir-themed alternate history where the Futurians back in the late 1930s early 1940s won the battle to control fandom and SF had strong socialist/communist themes. Until the 1950s when SF was viewed as an "un-American

activity" and there was a Magazine Code (like the old Comic Book Code) and the genre in the USA was sanitised. The Cold War is still ongoing but it is now a cool war (the 1991 hard-liner coup in the Soviet Union was successful) and US SF is either military SF, happy engineer tales, or pure space opera. Real SF exists outside of the USA; F & SF is published out of the UK, Galaxy and If out of Toronto, etc. And the US government continues to place pressure on the Canadian government to halt the flow of contraband literature from crossing the border, physically and electronically. The Canadian government does not consider this to be a high priority and does the bare minimum to appease the Americans on this issue; they sub-contract P.I.s to track down the distributors of this material. The story centres around one of those P.I.s in Hamilton, Ontario.

The story title is *Subversive Stories*; it has already been rejected twice. So, maybe the violation of this norm does still have consequences...

# **Scribbling on the Bog Wall**

## **Letters of Comment**

**Neil Williams**

As I write this, there is one LoC from the usual suspect (Lloyd). My comments are, of course, in glorious **pudmonkey**.

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May 16, 2014

Dear James:

Or Neil. Happy Day. There, that covers them all. Thanks for Swill 23, and must make some comments on what I've seen. Habit of mine.

Well, I am a little confused as well... We have a tentative agreement (the details have yet to be released) which may change things regarding my name. Plus we have a new President at the College so there may be positive internal policy changes...

Buncha Wobblies, hm? When I see the abuses of internships and other forms of unpaid labour, unions are needed more than ever. I also see reports of constructive dismissal through having your own job's description rewritten, and then suddenly not being qualified for your own job. I was dismissed from an agency-based job, and then I reapplied, I was told I didn't qualify for it, the job I'd held for eight months previously. Unions can be dangerous, but for the most part, they provide services to stave off the abuses of the workplace.

The current abuses are many. Re-writing of job descriptions being one of the newer management fads. I disagree that unions can be dangerous, unions serve to improve the workplace and employee compensation (in both salaries and benefits); if the union is not doing this, then, it is time for the membership to vote in an union executive that will. "Buncha Wobblies" -- sure, I take that label (although I am not a member of the IWW)...

Yes, Comrade Lester, I am a part of the bourgeois reactionary whatchamacallit, but with SF tendencies. I have hacked into the Federation transporter complex, and will be willing to beam over any number of antimatter buttons anywhere you might be. A GPS spot has been beamed directly into your epidermis, and we can beam a button into your person at any given time. Now THAT's serious, and a little enlightenment. :)

I cannot speak for Lester, but your ideological stance has been recorded and you are, indeed, a bourgeois reactionary apologist and class traitor. You are hereby sentenced to mandatory re-education -- for Trekkies the re-education centre is located on Tantalus V (you must find your own transportation and pay all transportation costs).

I have never enjoyed military science fiction, but I can see where it came about. Who else but the military, especially the American military, could have the funding to build the ships to take humanity to the stars? I've read elsewhere such dreams to go to space in such force an American wet dream based in the Cold War. (We all carry up to 2% Neanderthal DNA? I can think of several people where that percentage is much higher.)

I have on occasion read military SF, but this subgenre has no strong draw. The politics are almost always right-wing authoritarian with an almost obscene love of guns, guns, and

more guns... The USA military has had grandiose plans for space (at least in Earth orbit and the Moon on paper (perhaps they still do) during the Cold War period. These never materialised, and perhaps never will, which is fine by me. As for the stars; not bloody likely unless super cheap FTL is developed...

Oh, I am pretty certain that I have more than 2% Neanderthal DNA, my ancestors are from Mid-Wales one of the regions in the UK that has the highest frequency of archaic human DNA (ie. Neanderthal). So, I wouldn't be too surprised if I had up to 10% Neanderthal DNA.

We did go to Ad Astra, but only for the Saturday. We did have some fun, but through seeing old friends, and going for some shopping in the dealers' room. I did get the feeling from one or two committee members of "What are THEY doing here?", but as long as we pay our \$\$, we can go and enjoy ourselves. (I reminded them that of all the people I know, Yvonne is the only local fan to have attended EVERY Ad Astra.) CostumeCon 32 was more fun, not only because we were vendors, but also because we saw friends we hadn't seen in decades, we knew many of the other vendors there, we did about \$550 of business there, and we soaked in an atmosphere of creativity and appreciation. As I type, the weekend after the long Victoria Day weekend is Anime North, and we have a table there, and hope to do some good business. (With all this capital business discussion, I have totally blown my cover as a bourgeois reactionary. Whoops.)

Yes, you are petty-bourgeoisie and undoubtably a reactionary. Off to re-education with! As for Ad Astra... SHRUG, you paid your membership, therefore you can attend. It is not for the present con-runners to question the attending of con-runners past. (They should be sent for re-education as well...)

A question. I think I figured out a while ago why my own interests have changed as they have. Maybe it's a mid-life crisis, I don't know, but at some point, I stopped looking forward to the future with optimism (as a science fiction reader), and started looking back to the past with nostalgia (as a steampunk fan). Is there a particular reason for a change like that? Is this something a lot of people go through? I don't think this is such a strange thing to do, for I have changed interests in the past before, but I just don't know when it happened and why. I may never find out, or there might be some interesting psychological reasons that happened.

Ah, I touched on this many issues ago, I am certain. One: it is getting harder to write a near future story that doesn't get dated within a couple of years due to the pace of technological change. Two: yes, the current future trends do look bleak. And so, there is alternate history SF (including steampunk), steampunk fantasy, more fantasy, and far future SF in response to these two facts. On the flip side, we have the endless YA dystopias, Singularity booster wet-dreams, and detective/police fiction set in the very near future... In general, there is not a whole lot of hope out there right now and that is being reflected in the fiction. If the mood changes, so will the trends in fiction -- or so I speculate... I wouldn't call it a mid-life crisis but for someone who is a self-professed Trek fan it is an example of deviant behaviour -- you too could find yourself before the Trekkie Inquisition.

All done! Off it goes, and I am slowly getting caught up a huge pile of zines I wanted to respond to. Hope you and your merry band have a great long Victoria Day weekend.

Yours, Lloyd Penney

# **Endnote Disruptor Cannons**

## **Ablazing...**

**Neil Williams**

Whaaa! You have dissed Star Trek and the Great "God" Roddenberry. You have destroyed my illusions. Don't you know how much Star Trek means to me? Don't you know that Star Trek gives my life meaning? Don't you know that Star Trek saved my life? What kind of mean, heartless, sicko are you? Whaaaaaaaa!!!

The kind of mean, heartless, sicko who would write, "edit"<sup>7</sup>, and publish SWILL -- it is a very "strong fit", as the HR saying goes, for SWILL. Odds are, you have never even heard of SWILL, nor what the focus of this zine is, until someone on the Meath Park Star Trek Lives Blog posted a link from the Outer Wawa Trek Forever forum about this dastardly attack on all things Trek and a link to this particular issue. So, you don't know SWILL and you don't know me (or Lester for that matter).

Look, if Star Trek saved your life, or gives your life meaning, and if what has been written in this issue crushes that meaning; it couldn't be very strong to begin with.

Whaaaaa, you're any even bigger bully!

Really? So, I tracked you down on the internet and somehow forced you to read this issue; that would be a bully-tactic. But that didn't happen, did it? No, you were told that this issue was anti-Trek, you decided to read it -- all by yourself -- and you are now complaining about it.

Here is what it is really like to be bullied. (Note to regular SWILL readers this is a recap from a previous issue...) When I in my last year of primary school (first year of middle school had we remained in Quebec) my family moved to Ontario. This was the time period where the FLQ still existed and there was strong separatist sentiment in Quebec and the view from the rest of Canada was that Quebecers, all of them, were whiney, ungrateful, traitors. Especially in the regions of Ontario where, at this

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<sup>7</sup> As regular SWILL readers will have noticed, I do very little editing of the zine content. Only social media content is subjected to some editing.

time period, the Orange Lodge still had some influence. You see, we were Roman Catholic<sup>8</sup>, and we had arrived too late in the year for my siblings and I to be enrolled in the Catholic School Board, we had to go to the regular public school. And so, I was called a "frog" and a "traitor" and occasionally a "papist" and I was beaten up every single day at school for an entire year. Not just me against a single bully, no this would be me against all the boys in my grade. Not only was this tolerated by the administration of this school, it was approved of by the school principal (an Orangeman). This was constant, persistent, systemic bullying and one of the things that did help at that time was that my parents exposed me to science fiction.

I would not at all say that SF saved my life or that it gave my life meaning, but it helped, to some degree, to ease the pain. Thing is, I started on the works of Arthur C. Clarke and if I was a Clarke-fan version of a Trekkie, I would only read Clarke stories and novels. I would only read works that were very similar to Clarke. I would rant every time that someone did an adaptation of a Clarke story or novel that it wasn't perfect or exactly like the story/novel. I would leap into flame wars should anybody even in subtext be critical of Clarke the person or of any of his works. But, I don't do that. I still like Clarke; he is "old school" but he has an interesting style, but that style has flaws and not everything he wrote was good. I also moved on to other authors and I really don't have a single favourite author (though Clarke, LeGuin, MacLeod, and Hamilton do kind of have a favoured standing), nor do I have a favourite television series...

While there are novels that I regularly re-read (these are few) and there are others that I have re-read just because it has been many years since I first read them -- sometimes this can be bad for the novel/author (I liked Niven in my teens and early twenties, but find his work sucks, to me, today) or good (I read most of Malzberg's key works of fiction at too young an age and I appreciate them more today) or unchanged (I don't like Heinlein any more than I did (i.e. not) in my youth and I still like Spinrad). The thing is that my tastes have changed over the years, not a huge crevice, but a definite shift and the last thing I want to do is read the same thing over and over and over again...

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<sup>8</sup> Note to Americans; here in Canada, the majority of citizens who practice Christianity are Roman Catholics. I'm no longer a Roman Catholic or Christian, but I was when I was younger. They even had me Confirmed twice, but it didn't stick...

Therein, is the problem of the Trekkie. They want the same thing over and over and over again. Just Trek, and more Trek, and yet another helping of more Trek. Yeuck!!! No thank you!

Look Trekkie, branch out a little, will you!!! Science fiction is supposed to be a literature of ideas (yes, much of the time it doesn't live up to this, but the best of it does). Science fiction is supposed to make you think and question; to ask why and what if even if the answers are potentially or actually frightening. There is a term for any fiction that is intentionally and consistently sub-standard, fiction that gives you the answers you want to hear and never really challenges the reader -- we call it hack writing. Much, not all, but much of space opera falls into this category -- the reader's norms, values, mores, are not seriously challenged or are just made slightly uncomfortable -- it provides an action adventure that spans interplanetary to intergalactic space, many worlds, many cultures, etc. But most space opera doesn't really make you think or question any more than the latest major box office hit action film does. And neither does Star Trek, most of the time, and when it actually does do so (try and make you think or question), it then blows it with some technobabble or platitude-based eleventh hour solution that makes everything all right and wonderful (which never happens in the real world).

Whaaaaaaaa! You're mean!!!!

Hey Trekkie, look over here. WHACK! That's a slap to the head. Look, there is a great big universe of fiction out there, even if you just stay within science fiction -- strange new worlds, new civilisations, new writers, new universes that you can boldly explore... Or, you can remain within your Trek box, absorbing a steady diet of the TV dinner of fiction and endless reruns of Star Trek past. So yes, please stay in your self-imposed prison and throw away the key...

And fuck you too.

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