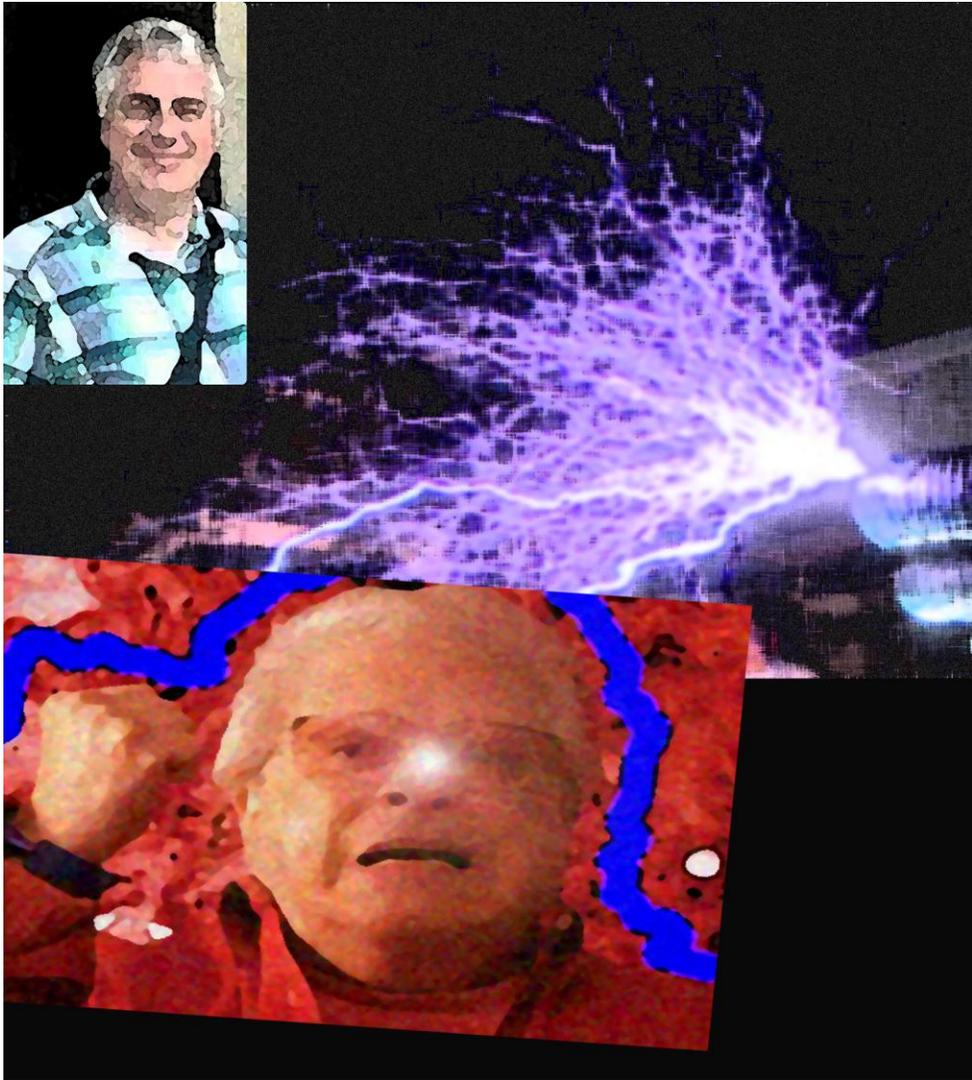


SWILD



#25

Autumn 2014

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SWILL

Issue #25 Autumn 2014

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Editorial: ~~Tolchocking~~ Baiting Ellison

Neil Jamieson-Williams

We Interrupt This Programme For the Following Announcement:

In March 26th, 2014 I decided that in keeping with the unannounced theme-arc of SWILL 2014 -- that of norm violation and attacking sacred cows - that the Autumn issue would be an anti-Ellison issue. On October 10, 2014, Harlan Ellison ® suffered a stroke, which was announced in the media on October 12th. Even I, the evil anti-fan editor, did consider changing the planned autumn "trash Ellison" issue, due to his illness. However, as the updates continue to come in, it would appear that Ellison is recovering well, that his mind has been unaffected, and that his physiotherapy is making progress - and, he is already writing again. As this is the situation, and, after all, as this is SWILL, there is no longer any concern, on my part, that I am kicking-someone-when-they-are-already-down. This is not as mean-spirited as it sounds; unlike the other victims of SWILL in 2014 (e.g. Trekkies and "trufen"), Ellison - even when partially physically incapacitated - is a target that can hit back and hit back with a venomous bite. I truly and honestly (really honestly) wish Mr. Ellison a continued and rapid recovery. I have held this issue back, just to make sure that Ellison's health continues to improve. It has and winter is almost upon us. That being said, the show must go on; here is the Autumn 2014 issue of SWILL...

We Now Return to Our Regularly Scheduled Programme, Already in Progress:

... it's a rather futile task, or one that does evoke a certainty of failure; so, be it. In a truly quixotic fashion an attempt will be made to tolchock Ellison -- knowing full well that the attempt will probably fail. However, SWILL has always been very adept at prodding at soft spots and pushing buttons in the past¹ and so "baiting" would be the more appropriate editorial title.

¹ less so these days (perhaps it is because I am no longer in my early twenties when there were many issues that I viewed as polarised black-and-

However, in this case, there is a potential danger -- one does not exactly know what may be invoked by this issue of SWILL. I may call forth a demon that could consume me - I am treading on the tail of a tiger, which in all probability will maul me and eat me. SHRUG. And yet like the Tarot deck Fool, I go onward.

So, what am I going to hit Ellison with? That is the big question, indeed. The the crux, the foundation, the centre of it all is that I have respect for this man's work -- both fiction and non-fiction. He is a brilliant writer, intelligent, with biting wit, etcetera, etcetera, and so on... I like a lot of what he has written over the past fifty five plus years, and some of what he has written I have hated, and some of it was just okay; the majority though, I have liked, and some of his work will be remembered long after his passing as 20th Century literature in the short story form. Ellison's work has been an influence (but just one of many influences). Just to make it clear, I am not a fan -- i.e. not an Ellison fan, someone who worships every word that emerges from his manual typewriter or the man himself.² I neither deify nor do I demonise Ellison -- he is just another human being, who happens to be, in my opinion, and excellent writer of short fiction. However, there are a few malenky items that I would like to deal with; that Ellison is an uber-misanthrope, has a slight tendency toward "yellow journalism" in his essays, that he is a Yank, and has been documented to have behaved as an arsehole. And that is more than enough to play with in this editorial. And I am going to use the shotgun approach, where you just hope that some pellets will strike home and stick.

When it comes to being a misanthrope, Ellison is one. Although he likes to attribute this to the influence of Mark Twain, this is not an apt comparison. Twain did work with and made use of misanthropic themes, but, he was not a misanthrope. Twain still liked humanity and held the belief that if humankind could just free ourselves of the notions that we were hand-crafted by some divine being and that we should await our reward in the next life that we would make substantial steps to improving ourselves, ourselves. Both Twain and Ellison are atheists -- I am not --

white-issues and also because of the fragmentation in the spec-fic supra-genre that makes it very difficult to piss off everyone).

² As I have stated in previous issues, I have no single favourite author in speculative fiction. I have a major "pantheon" which includes the eclectic mix of Clarke, Leiber, LeGuin, Malzberg, MacLeod, Moorcock, Sheldon, and Spinrad -- Ellison resides in my second tier...

though I agree 100% with both of them that if you take the position that the universe and this small planet were created by, and watched over by, and ruled by a divine being, then the only logical and rational conclusion is that "God is a malign thug."

But, Ellison goes further than Twain does with this. Ellison takes the position that humankind, the entire human species -- at the core -- is little more than scum; a mean-spirited, moronic, venal, blood-thirsty, lazy, greedy, blight with no redeeming qualities that are worthless and should be eliminated as the living waste products that they are. With one exception (which is so typically human; that there is at least one exception to a universal, and that the single exception is also self-serving) -- those within the human species who are creators, in particular the makers of art.

Uhhmm... Does he mean all creators (which would include scientists, inventors, as well as artists -- and could also include economists and financiers, and that is now very problematic) or does he just mean artists? And how is this defined, exactly. Who is making these grand decisions as to whom is a creator or an artist? Is it society (that has a tendency to not recognise creators and artists for their true worth during that person's lifetime)? Is it the creative/artistic establishments (which are, of course, never, ever wrong or biased)? Is it the will of the people (not bloody likely, given Ellison's views on the average person, and again, a collective not known for having any better track record than society as a whole in judging creativity and art)? Or is it just Ellison, himself?

First of all, are we, as a species, mostly just scum? Not really. I am not making the argument that we are noble, or moral, or ethical, because, we aren't. And anyway, it is we, the human race, that have created these many codes of nobility and morality and ethics -- codes that often conflict with one another. We are primates, we ARE the third chimpanzee, with some of the worst aspects of Pan troglodytes and perhaps a bit of the best of Pan paniscus mixed into our unique melange of a genome. I am not making the "cop-out" that biology is to blame, but I am saying that it is a definite factor that has to be considered.

We also have to look at our societies and cultures. Looking back over the past 10,000 years, we can say that most of our societies sucked and I would speculate that many also sucked prior to the Neolithic Revolution. But things did go downhill once we develop

agriculture; inequality (economic and gender), hierarchy, authoritarianism, imperialism, slavery, religious dogma, and so on... On the other hand, agriculture did pave the way for the emergence of what we call civilisation - writing, metallurgy, architecture, engineering, medicine, the movable-type printing press, industrialisation, etc. Wonderful benefits and terrible consequences. One could blame society for why we are the way we are. A strong case could be made here; after all, for the past ten millennia most of us have lived under authoritarian rule (democracy is a rare and precious thing amidst civilisation and one can argue that democracy is actually antithetical to civilisation). But, this position is also a cowardly attempt to weasel out of responsibility. Nevertheless, society is a definite factor to be considered.

Or are we to blame, each and every one of us; including me, including Lester, including Ellison? Well, we are. We do not take the time, we are not involved, we are too wrapped up in our own problems, we just want to survive, maintain what we have, get by, and maybe get a little bit more, and have some level of comfort. This is not, in of itself, evil - though it can allow for evil to flourish. And this is also an easy answer that blames both the perpetrator and the victim equally. That easy American answer (more on that later) that it doesn't matter if you were born to privation or are a trust-fund kid, you both have equal opportunity to succeed, if only you self-actualise, or seize the day, or think positively, etc. It does contain some truth, but not the whole truth, and it is also an evasion.

However, there are no simple and easy answers. Each of these three factors play a role in why we are what we are; imperfect, fallible, at times reprehensible, at other times wonderful, and entirely human.

And part of being human is being creative and artistic.

Now, I do agree that what is created, the art itself, may be absolute shite. It may be over warmed, re-processed, naive, below sophomoric, moronic, derivative garbage -- it may be pure swill -- but we are all capable of some level of creativity. And some of us possess an innate talent above the average, and many of us possess the average that can be improved by practice and dedication to achieve a degree of excellence, and some of us were doled out a below average serving of creativity that still could be built upon. And just because one is a brilliant musician does not mean that that same person can write creatively. And many of

our creators, and our artists, are only mediocre at best, and yet, they can still make a living perusing their art -- they are not famous, or rich, or outstanding in their art, but they do support themselves via their creativity. Should only our best creators be spared and the rest be sent to the re-education camps, the gulags, or into the arms of the death squads?

If Ellison had been granted the powers of a god, or even that of a demi-god, the answer to that question would be, "Yes." And, he would have already laid waste to nearly all of humankind.

My second issue with Ellison is that, at times, there is a hint - - and at other times a stench -- of yellow journalism in his essays. Yes, I do realise that these are, in the majority, polemic, opinion pieces and should not be treated as if they were actual detailed analyses on a particular issue, topic, etc. I do fully understand that these are not academic articles in even the loosest definition of the term. However, when the author of these opinion pieces condemns the lumpen proles for not having an informed opinion, for not checking facts, and then proceeds to commit the same offence -- then the author should be held accountable.

Ellison does do this; yes, he really has. For example, in Installment 48 and Installment 49 of "Harlan Ellison's Watching" in the December 1994 and January 1995 issues of Fantasy and Science Fiction he trashes two entire generations on the basis of evidence that is simultaneously slim, biased, and circumstantial. I really don't know where to begin with here -- there is so much wrong with Ellison's analysis of what he calls the moron generation (switching back between both the Baby Boomers and Generation X and tarring both equally and treating both as being synonymous) that it deserves its own article. However, as I am just using this as an example, we will stop here and I will conclude that Mr. Ellison's informed opinion is not always as informed as he thinks that it is... (Oh, and just to ease the ego; yes Harlan, you are 100% correct, the 1994 film version of The Shadow is horrible on numerous levels and is definitely a "stupid film" -- I would add in more of Ellison's metaphors but I do desire to avoid American civil lawsuits -- I will add my own instead, it was rancid chickenshit.)

And so we segue into my third issue with Ellison, American-blindness. While, Los Angeles may be the current centre of American culture and American art, and while USA culture and art

is dominant -- for now -- within the infant global culture, diffused by globalisation and the corporato-governmental arms of PillageCorp (a subsidiary of Loot&Burn R Us Inc.) and their fellow conglomerate/nation state consortiums, as they roll forth to transform the world into one big, exactly the same, suburban sprawl and power-centre complex. All of us -- who reside outside of the USA (though also within the marginalised populations within the USA) -- experience American cultural imperialism. This is not a good thing -- the homogenisation of everything -- for the world or even for the USA. Yes, it is beneficial for the interests of the USA entertainment conglomerates in that it means more profits and more wealth. But the cost, the cost is cultural loss and, to use the American term, cultural levelling. I don't think that whatever they are doing in California is the pinnacle, the zenith of human culture and I want some choice, thank you very much. And I want the choice to choose my own cultural products that speak to my experience, not the Henry Ford option - - you can have any culture you want, so long as it is Californian.

And finally, the most subjective of these issues -- is Ellison an asshole? Well, I have only met him once, at Westercon 37 (recounted in SWILL 14 "Starlost Memories") and that was not a positive experience.³ There are many other recollections of

³ I also did some more research here as well prior to this issue. I'll add in some extra information, though the names will be omitted to protect both the innocent and the guilty. Back in 1980s, I wrote a lot of radio drama and non-fiction radio programming. I used to socialise with a small group who wrote professionally (though, in my case, not for markets that would qualify for SFWA membership - and I was also in ACTRA, out of ACTRA, in a see-saw situation depending upon the production and whether or not I was a producer, I usually was; it was complicated...) and worked in the same area of the downtown. We met every two to three weeks for drinks; there were four regulars and about six irregulars in the group. I was the only one who wrote SF, though the soft-core porn writer occasionally wrote within the borderlands of SF, and there was one of the irregulars who seemed to know a lot about science fiction but never stated what it was that he actually wrote. On the road to Westercon, I discovered that that irregular was a published SF author and that my girlfriend's best friend was his mistress - as they say, small world. So, it is on this author's vouching that I got into the SFWA suite to begin with, I didn't have the proper badge to be in there, which Ellison would have noticed at a glance, and probably assumed that I was some fan who somehow managed to crash the suite.

Ellison behaviour by many people who have known him and or worked with him that would lend support to the hypothesis that Ellison is an asshole. I have seen him on television and in the 2008 documentary film, *Dreams with Sharp Teeth*; and there is evidence that Ellison is arrogant, egotistic, and some that he is a bit of an asshole. The central issue being the definition of an asshole; according to the Oxford, "a stupid, irritating, or contemptible person". Well, of the three descriptors, I would go with number two -- irritating -- and thus, on these grounds, Ellison is an asshole. And thus, so is my father -- who is only three years senior to Ellison -- and who is known to make similar rants about people's driving habits to those recorded of Ellison in *Dreams with Sharp Teeth* (though my father, an Anglo-Quebecer Roman Catholic, would use the word "swine" or some Quebecois swear word where Ellison uses the word "motherfucker"). And, I guess, so am I -- the publication of *SWILL* being ample evidence against me.

In conclusion -- there isn't any. I have fired my grapeshot and we will see if it finds its mark. If it does, I guess I'll receive something in the post from Mr. Ellison's legal counsel...

I could also be that the author (not the same person as in the paragraph above) who introduced me to Ellison was a factor - I am not naming names here but, as far as I know, this author didn't publish anything past 1991 and almost of his prior output was military SF. Now, this author lived close enough to the border to be able to listen to the radio serials that I wrote when they aired and he liked them a lot. Well, he liked the universe I created, but he didn't like the political slant; he wrote the typical right of centre, authoritarian, military SF space opera and my serial was military-ish interplanetary space opera that was left of centre - the anarchists and socialists in the asteroid belt vs the big, bad corporate Dominion of Earth. Anyway, this author and I had met at V-Con and at Norwescon previously and had political arguments and still remained on a strong acquaintance-level. I did not agree with his quasi-Libertarian politics (quasi because he had a Heinleinian notion of who gets to be a citizen - Libertarian Party world for those folks and top down authoritarian rule for the non-citizens) or his views on women or his views that hunting deer with automatic weapons is still a sport (I was a hunter back then, though a bow-hunter). And he didn't agree with what he called my "commie shit". SHRUG. I don't know, I'm just giving Ellison a further out - maybe he was rude because he despised the person who introduced me.

And yes, you are going to be forced to open another webpage to see what was written in *SWILL* #14...

Thrashing Trufen: An Archetypical Anti-Fan

Neil Jamieson-Williams

When it comes to being an anti-fan, or in advocating an anti-fan agenda, in comparison with Ellison, Lester and I are simply pikers. While Toronto fandom, in particular the aging trufen of Toronto and southern Ontario, see us as eevil-doers and a cancer upon the purity of fannish essence - I have to admit that Ellison has us beat, every time; even if he was strapped into a chair a la A Clockwork Orange, he'd still whoop us. Ellison is the archetypical anti-fan.

I could cite, I normally would, but there are legal questions that Canada and the USA do not agree upon regarding what is and what isn't fair use in a piece like this, and Ellison being an American (and an American who has provided ample evidence of being litigious) may decide to sue -- which is an annoyance that I don't need -- so, I will refer you, the reader to look up the examples yourself.

The evidence for Ellison being an archetypical anti-fan does require a qualifier; Ellison doesn't hate all fans, just the worst of the breed.

Exhibit One: This can be found within the essay "You Don't Know Me, I Don't Know You" wherein Ellison pillories fandom for:

- contributing to theft (of royalties/annuities) by purchasing bootleg editions of SF authors works
- believing that an author's characters are an accurate reflection of the author's personality/personality traits.
- and the elevator story -- that probably occurred at the 1974 Discon in Washington, DC -- that should be read.⁴

Exhibit Two: This can be found within the essay "Exogenesis" that tolchocks and razrezzes fandom from start to finish. Not only are there examples from Ellison's experiences, but also from many writers from the same time period -- 1984. The kernel of this

⁴ This essay can be found in the July 1977 edition of The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction or in the book Sleepless Nights in the Procrustean Bed.

piece was Ellison's guest of honour speech from Westercon 37 that was expanded upon as an essay. There is too much material to itemise here and the vast bulk of it damning and with due cause. Again, you should actually read it...⁵

Sidebar: As mentioned last issue, I know many of you balk at the thought of being directed to source material -- "why won't you just tell us" -- but, you know what, fuck off. One, to "just tell you" would violate copyright (not going to do that). Two, it is good for you. If you are going to have an informed opinion, you really should actually read the source material. Yes, reading the Coles Notes for Mansfield Park because you found early 19th century English too boring, or you didn't have time, may have got you through a secondary school English Lit test, but you really didn't actually read the novel and you really don't know the novel. If you actually read the source material, you have a better foundation to base your opinion on rather than just my interpretation of the source material.

Two exhibits are all that are needed. There is nothing that Lester or I have done to fandom in print that Ellison has not surpassed, in some instances by a few parsecs. We are mere shadows in comparison. In his wake, I wonder whether we should just shut down SWILL altogether. Ah, but who would annoy the local trufen, then. That would be an abrogation of responsibility on our part. While I cannot speak for Lester, I myself, am in awe before the master, the archetypical arch anti-fan, Ellison.

And I implore him to -- keep tolchocking fandom!

⁵ This can be found in the book Over the Edge or in The Essential Ellison.

Pissing on a Pile of Old Amazings

A Modest Column by Lester Rainsford

Do you know that there is one person in the world who ever got ripped off by other people? Do you know that there is one person with the guts and the clear-headed orneriness to declare that he got ripped off and oppressed by the Man right in public? Do you know that there is one person in the whole entire world who has held on to Artistic Integrity when all the luddite know-nothing philistines have sold out to mammon and convenience? Do you know that there is one person in the entire universe, yea verily in the entire history of the cosmos since the Big Bang itself, who has been hard done by and has written about this and talked at length (and at length) and moreso has declared that he has been hard done by, and deserves the greatest of praise and respect thereby, to right the wrongs done to him?

Yes, Lester's modest column is ~~XX~~ so underappreciated.

But to hear Harlan Ellison talk about this, he is even worse done by.

Nonsense. Harlan is someone whose time has passe'd, long passed. His career is as dead as Last Dangerous Visions, and his influence is similarly dead. The only reason he's talked about these days is through misbehaviour and litigation. If Swill didn't talk about Harlan, who would talk about him at all? Who would care?

Harlan Ellison should be happy to be ~~XX~~ talked about here. It's ~~XXX~~ the only place that's award-winning that cares, after all.

Lester is not interested enough to go back and research if Ellison was a true enfant terrible or just an enfant terrible manqué. The only people who really care right now would be nodding off over their Postum. AND IF YOU know what Postum is, you know what Lester means. In any case, enfant terribles morph, with time, to batshit crazy old guys. Harlan's a bit different from Heinlein, for example, but the principle remains. And the onlyt people who are going to listen to batchit crazy old guys are other old people, possibly certifiable as well. Like Swill and its readers thereof.

It's all good!

But, you know, what's old is new again. Lester isn't sure how much the past is really the past, or whether it recurs, like the Buddhist dream (or nightmare). That seems to be the case with award-winning SF these days. Lester will write ~~XX~~ more about this anon.

Flogging a Dead Trekkie:

Violating the ~~Taboos~~ Norms of Science Fiction

Part 8 of 8 – Genuinely Feminist SF

Neil Jamieson-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 SEVEN: Genuinely Feminist SF

"Science fiction in which women are perceived to react to events and internalize in a way which is neither a culturally received stereotype nor a merely male stereotype projected onto female characters."

I, like Malzberg, am somewhat ambiguous regarding exactly what a genuinely feminist SF would be, other than to say that some of our female writers have produced examples of this type of SF. It is far easier to state what it isn't, and much of the female protagonists, even written by women, are really just the standard male protagonist with female genitalia. I am also not certain that this is a form of science fiction that I would be comfortable writing, and I have never previously, gone out intentionally to perform this task. Nor am I confident in the outcome.

Given the restrictions of the genre, and of our society, it is hard, for me, to truly imagine a real feminist science fiction. I am not saying that the task is impossible, after all, it has been done, but it is a difficult task.

I will place emphasis first upon our society, as it strongly impacts upon the genre. Even though, here in the western industrial democracies, and, in particular, within Canada, where the status of women is currently almost on par with that of hunter-gatherer societies;⁶ these remain patriarchal societies. Here at home, our current federal government is of the opinion that the proper place for a woman is as a wife and home-maker (that women don't need to be lawyers, or business-people, or politicians as this would take away time from raising a family). While that political party has transformed itself and aligned itself with the USA Republican Party over the past fourteen years and is not a true mirror to the Canadian body politic, those memes do remain within our society. The present scandal regarding sexual harassment of female MPs in the House of Commons is an illustration of those old memes that possess a strong cultural inertia.

It is difficult to envisage a genuinely gender-neutral, let alone a genuinely feminist society. Regardless of social engineering, reforms, and etcetera -- it does appear that there are biological tendencies that cannot be ignored, try as we might. Yes, culture can trump biology, and does so all the time, but the biological factors don't just disappear; they remain. And, because we live in a patriarchal society, because we do not live in a gender-neutral society, it is difficult to determine what is set in place by biology and what is built by culture. Gender enculturation or socialisation begins, with our present technology, prior to birth -- as soon as the parents know the sex of the child -- and at the very latest upon birth. As the parents have not been raised in a gender-neutral society and

⁶ In hunter-gatherer societies, most of the food supply is that which is gathered by the women of the band. Both sexes hunt small game, and the men engage in big-game hunting. However, hunting is not always successful and is always less successful than gathering. In these societies, adult women and adult men have equal status and equal say in how the band is governed. Any group of men who desire to install a patriarchal coup will be quickly stopped in their tracks by the simple and non-violent tactic of ceasing to share the plant food gathered by the women with the men -- people like to eat. Only when a culture has previously been an agricultural or horticultural society that has now adopted a hunter-gatherer economy do we see gender inequality; the status of women is always lower in agricultural and horticultural economies and this cultural trait is maintained even when the people switch to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle.

because the surrounding culture is not gender-neutral, gender enculturation is very rapid. It provides us with yet another chicken and egg conundrum.

The genre of science fiction is still a male dominated genre, even today; the speculative fiction surpa-genre is a little better, but only because of the YA market. But, getting away from the just the gender of the writers; based on context alone, there is little within speculative fiction that could be said to be feminist. And there is a large segment of spec-fic, especially in fantasy/YA fantasy, that is anti-feminist -- e.g. The Twilight series and the protagonist Bella (who is an anti-feminist archetype of the helpless, infantilised woman -- or, in this case, woman-child) and the numerous knock-offs. For all of the "strong female characters" that we now have in speculative fiction, those characters, tend not to be very feminist -- and where they are, they tend to be, at best, moderate (minor reform) feminists or anachronistic feminists.⁷

Can there be a genuinely feminist science fiction? I will say that it is definitely possible. I will say that the more the status of women increases (and we have backslid in this regard with our current government as many of the party members of the party in power believe that the proper place for a woman is as a homemaker -- preferably barefoot and pregnant, and if not in the kitchen, at least in the home -- as stated by my local Conservative MP) the more possible and probable it is for genuinely feminist science fiction to find a niche in the marketplace and a readership. Though, I honestly think that a true feminist science fiction must await the emergence of a true feminist culture (or at least counterculture) in opposition to the patriarchal global culture that we all reside within.

⁷ So, the queen is a feminist and may extend some modest level of women's rights to her ladies of the court. But she has no intention of granting any human rights (political or gender) to the peasants -- who are not really fully human, being commoners -- or to make any changes to society as a whole. The pucky, feminist protagonist, who pulls-herself-up-by-her-own-bootstraps, to rise from the dregs of society to be Admiral of the Imperial Fleet will be a top-down authoritarian who has no difficulty with any form of authoritarian rule, be that absolute monarchy, state socialism, or corporate facsimile. These are not real feminist characters -- though they do fit the bill as strong female characters

Is it something that I could write? I don't know, maybe -- but there will remain a high level of uncertainty here... Initially, my plan when I finally got to this "taboo" was to end this piece with ambiguity and the vague promise of making the attempt sometime in the future. However, I did write a story -- a rather long story -- that is, at least feminist, though I do not think that it can be called genuinely feminist. I wrote it for an anthology⁸ that wanted feminist stories, and also wanted the protagonist to be bi or lesbian. There were some other restrictions in the anthology guidelines -- and there was a key one that I ignored (which will be one of the reasons why the story was rejected) because the story required that this restriction be violated, though I had some hope that the story itself may have surmounted the restriction-violation...

At present, I am uncertain what to do with this tale. It either has to be strongly cut or heavily expanded, before it goes out again. I'm still thinking about this one... The story's working title is Welcome to the Occupation.

⁸ For those readers wondering why some of my turn-around times are rapid and others are long, here you go, from my recent experience. Anthologies are more structured, tend to have themes, and also have slow response times. Magazines are more rapid, and the online magazines are faster still, and the flash fiction markets are the swiftest of them all (usually). For this experiment, I have also, for the most part, written these stories with the specific norm-violation in mind and a specific anthology in mind -- anthologies have strict deadlines and I am not too good with self-imposed deadlines...

Scribbling on the Bog Wall:

Letters of Comment

Neil Jamieson-Williams

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

1706-24 Eva Rd.
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September 26, 2014

Dear Neil:

Many thanks for Swill 24. A 2-4 of Swill, and let's hope there's a deposit on the empties. I will make sure I have a comfortable seat, with some snacks, for I want a ringside seat...

Don't worry, the Inquisitor SWILLus -- the SWILL Inquisition -- has a nice comfy seat waiting for you, ringside, but no snacks...

As the Wrath of the Trekkies rains down on your head! Trek has had its time, and lots of it. It's been good and bad, and right now with the so-called reboot, I think it could be much better instead of loose remakes of old Trek movies. (There's a phrase which proves I'm old...old Trek movies.) I want good stories, I want a return to the original timeline, as original as it gets with the modern series, like Voyager and the TNG movies. Excellent exploration of the nearly 50 years of Trek, and it definitely makes me want to ask, "And THEN what happened?" Space opera, yes, but still there's some excellent adventures there. Some TNG episodes are amazing even to this day. "Measure of a Man", "The Inner Light"...some great stuff. I even liked the way the DS9 cast was edited into the original tribble episode. Is Trek too happyhappy? Perhaps, but it's a more pleasant alternative to what leads the news these days.

Lloyd, you may be a Trekkie, but you are not a mindless Trekkie. There were some great episodes in the original series, as well as great episodes in TNG, less so in the later series in the franchise. Of the Star Trek films, I have said little (though Lester has spoken to this) because most of them suck shit, even the new ones. Almost all are rebooted/rehashed episodes from the television series' and overall, poor rehashes of these story ideas. Yes, it would be nice if someone could reboot the franchise (film or television) with some truly original material and story ideas; but, that is not going to happen -- they are going to go with what they consider to be safe and a proven money-maker.

As for the Wrath of the Trekkies, so far, not a peep. However, I will probably encounter some Trekkies at Ad Astra so I'm not out of the woods yet...

You may have to ease up on the trufen these days...they seem to be mostly in their 70s and 80s, and they are cranky, and they need their meds and their sleep. Trufandom, such as it is and was, seems to be on the way out. A shame in some ways, but in others, the dinosaurs did die out at some point. I think that's why Yvonne and I have been looking elsewhere within fandom, and finding other fun. Next month in Guelph is Genrecon, and we have a dealer's table up there, and Yvonne has agreed to be a masquerade judge. We may have some fun up there, who knows?

I have left the trufen alone since the Spring issue and that will continue until the 2014 Annual in February. There is not too much more to be said about these seniors of fandom... Of course, if any of them start sending in LOCs or commenting about how evil it is that SWILL exists in other zines, then it is once again, open season.

How was Genrecon? How was it in comparison to ConBravo?

Gene Roddenberry was an LA police officer who, like many people in LA, decided to try his hand at screenwriting. He had a good

idea or two, but then, he imagined up Star Trek, and look what happened there.

Yeah, he came up with a few good ideas, and Trek was one of them. I am preaching to the choir here, sort of. You may be a Trek fan, but you are not a real Trekkie from any of our discussions face-to-face or online. I fully agree that Roddenberry had some good, perhaps even a couple of great ideas, but he really was only, at best, a good producer. I believe that we both agree that he had many failings and was neither a saint or demigod as he is seen by many a Trekkie. However, I have never been to your home, so for all I know you have a major shrine to Saint Gene in your living room...

I'm getting mandatory re-education! Yay! University is far too expensive these days! Neil and Lester are going to pay my way! Thanks, guys! We did over \$1000 business at Anime North, so are we now capitalist reactionary bourgeoisie? Bring on the Trekkie Inquisition. Now THEY certainly weren't expected.

Tsk-tsk... You display poor comprehension skills -- I did state that "you must find your own transportation and pay all transportation costs" Sorry to burst your bubble; besides, the fictional planet for Trekkie re-education is reportedly, not a nice place. I cannot speak for the Trekkie Inquisition, though I am definitely on their "list", but I can speak regarding the SWILL Inquisition and you are currently on the list of potential heretics...

Science fiction made my life easier because my own life as a one-grade-ahead, smaller-than-everyone-else nerdy boy was rough. No friends, and any activities I enjoyed were solitary. Off on a bike ride by myself, for example. SF took me out of my humdrum existence and took me to the Galactic Rim for adventures far bigger than myself, and allowed me to meet impossible beings, and lots of them. It satisfied the need for adventure in a dull time. Fandom then brought all of us who felt that way together, and perhaps gave us all friends for the first time in our lives. I have friends from my initial days of fandom, which makes them about 37 years in my acquaintance, and I can't think of any other

activity I could devote my time and life to that would get me that. One of those friends from my early days in Toronto fandom, I married.

As I mentioned last issue, discovering SF helped during the first few years in Ontario. In secondary school I was a nerd -- but of the "cooler?" weird nerd clique -- who had as our rivals the traditional nerd clique (the Math Club type). Us weird nerds made gunpowder in the chem lab and then blew up holes in the football field, we did other miscreant things as well (some of which if we did in secondary school today would result in a visit from CSIS or perhaps even USA Homeland Security), and our zenith (I think; Lester can rebut if I have this wrong) was the legal putsch of the Math Club (the holy of holy of our rivals) the rewriting of the club constitution, and disbanding of the club -- they would have to wait until next fall to re-form the club.

We've all enjoyed Star Trek together, and my earliest days in fandom included a brand new Star Trek club in Victoria, BC. Yet, even with the joy of those new friends, I still asked myself if there was more, and I did find the much larger world of SF fandom, and no regrets ever there. There was so much more to discover than in the world of Trek. I regret that I see so much of those early fannish days disappearing, although fandom itself carries on in a form many of my peers wouldn't recognize. I regret this, but I am not going to be the grumpy old man on the porch, snarling at the younger kids having fun on his front lawn. You've got to have your own fun, and in this case, we are by reinventing ourselves.

All I can say is the same thing I have said before to you and to Graeme. Fandom is changing and you don't necessarily have to change with it, but it may be more comfortable to change a bit. Otherwise, you become one of those "trufen" bitching about how this isn't the way we did things in 1979 and claiming that everyone outside of their group, the vast majority, is a fakefan. Or you can just do your own thing and ignore the

changes. Or you can do your own thing and make some changes to fit in with the new fandom.

I still say this is a transition period. It will all work out in the end and there will still be fandom, in a modified form. The fact that the youth (under 30s) are organising their own fan-run conventions means that there will still be fan-run conventions and that type of fandom, its just that the style of programming will be a little different. I am not worried or concerned. Think about it; if we were to grab some forty year old fanzine fan from 1980 and bring them forward in time to attend Ad Astra 2015, they would initially claim that fandom has died and literary fandom has been overrun by the mediafen barbarians and that this, is, the end of days...

So yes, go ahead and reinvent yourselves within the changing fandom -- it's called adaptation ;)

Now that I've gone on at length, and much more length than I ever intended, I will shut this down, and say thanks. Our next convention is in October at Genrecon in Guelph, and we have a dealers' table there. In November will be SFContario 5, but we expect to be at the Toronto International Book Fest at the Metro Convention Centre a good portion of that weekend. Take it easy, our best to Lester, and see you next time. (I noticed, back to your regular name?)

A little more on that in the end part of the Endnote...

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

See you at Ad Astra -- I hope...

Endnote: The Starlost Singularity

Neil Jamieson-Williams

We begin this piece with the following announcement:

SWILL RETRACTION:

It is rare that SWILL makes a retraction -- never done in the Original SWILL -- but it does happen on occasion; it is more common in the current SWILL incarnation (as I am a middle-aged academic and not just a rabble-rouser in his 20s). And I am making this one so visible that even the most troglodytic of readers can not miss it, because this one is both important and germane to this issue's theme.

Over the years, and in SWILL (e.g. SWILL #14), I have recounted the tale of my very first SF convention, Fanfair 3 in Toronto in 1975. The central part of that story was my encounter with Harlan Ellison® -- sort of. That encounter may indeed be apocryphal.

Here is a just-the-facts (based upon recall) of what happened. I would have arrived at the convention around 11:00 AM, Saturday August 2nd, 1975. I did not know anybody, I was sixteen years old, I had never been to a SF convention before, and I arrived wearing a Starlost t-shirt (one of our neighbours worked on the series). I don't know how long I was at the con before the incident happened, maybe about an hour. Two adults -- i.e. two men in their early to mid twenties grabbed me and then proceeded to carry me into the panel room -- one man had me by the shoulders and the other by my feet -- and presented me to the assembled panellists. One of the grown-ups (i.e. age 30 to 40) on the panel went ballistic over the t-shirt I was wearing screaming, "Get it out of here now, before I have it disembowelled." Laughing, the two men ran, still carrying me, from the panel room. Once outside set me down and one of them said, "We got Harlan Ellison." They then thanked me and walked away.

Now, being that I was a naive teenager from the burbs -- someone who had read Paingod and Other Delusions as well as Ellison stories in anthologies, who actually liked Ellison's stories, and who had no idea that Cordwainer Bird was one of Ellison's pen

names -- I almost walked back into that panel room. However, some deep level of self preservation told me that I shouldn't, and that is exactly what I did.

In preparing for this issue of SWILL, I decided to dig into the past and see if I could find any supporting documentation to this tale. I couldn't find any. In part, there is very little in the way of documents. Waaay back forty years ago, small regional cons in Toronto didn't have very much actual information in their programme books -- for this panel, all that the programme book states is that there was one from Noon to 2 PM (no topic, no list of participants). In fact, the only actual evidence I have that the guy on the panel who went apeshit was Ellison, is that this is what the two young adults (who had temporarily abducted me) said that that person was, and from all appearances at the time - - the fact that they were congratulating themselves over the stunt -- they actually thought that that person was Ellison. Just some weak circumstantial evidence and nothing more...

Thus, I must state with all honesty, that the only evidence I have that the person on that panel was Ellison, is that the two fans in their twenties thought that that person was Ellison. Therefore, I retract the claim I have met Ellison twice - I only met him that one time at Westercon 37 (see this issue's Editorial).

RETRACTION ENDS:

Okay, so that is out of the way. As far as I can tell, I never, ever met Ellison at Fanfair 3 in 1975. I did have some unknown person go nutso over the Starlost t-shirt I was wearing that I was told was Ellison, but there is no evidence that that person was Harlan Ellison ®.

And so, we shall enter into the dangerous waters of Ellison and The Starlost (one more time), where your editor may -- at a later date -- be devoured by some Lovecraftian horror summoned forth by Ellison and/or his minions (or more probable, a letter by registered mail from Ellison's lawyer). Where the editor (wearing one of his other hats) of this pinnacle of literary perfection does find himself trapped within the event horizon of The Starlost and the litigious nature of Ellison. So, this attack has a personal aspect to it -- yes, it does involve my own enlightened self interest.

In SWILL #14 -- Starlost Memories -- I discuss The Starlost and state that, at the time that this series aired, that I liked it. I also state, in my defence, that I had just turned 14 and my previous experience with television SF was old Doctor Who serials and one single rerun of an original Star Trek episode.⁹ In brief, we didn't yet have cable and all of my experience with television was primarily Canadian television.

I have read Ellison's award winning teleplay "Phoenix Without Ashes", I have read the novel version by Ellison and Bryant, and the more recent graphic novel version. I have also read the shooting script of "Voyage of Discovery", production notes from CTV/Glen Warren, and I have interviewed two of the principal performers, and three of the F/X people over the years. And I have read other additional material over the past twenty odd years about, or alluding to, this series. The whole pre-production, production, and post-production of this project is akin to a fusion between American slapstick and a poorly written French farce and is a testimony to Murphy's Law. As I concluded in "Starlost Memories", this was a missed opportunity.

Yes, I agree with Ellison that "Phoenix Without Ashes" was superior to "Voyage of Discovery"; but it was not vastly superior, in my opinion (in contrast with the Star Trek episode "The City on the Edge of Forever" where Ellison's final script was indeed vastly superior to the shooting script for that episode). But, Klenman is also correct; "Phoenix Without Ashes" was (and still is) "biblical, heavy, and dull". In defence of the "heavy and dull", this is the first episode of the series -- it has to set the whole series universe up so there will be expository material that slows the pace. However, for someone who is not a member of the Abrahamic trio of faiths; yeah, the "biblical" charge stands.

How does "Phoenix Without Ashes" stand up today? It is good, but not wow! Yes, there are the interesting oppositions and subtexts for what was claimed to be a morality play for our times, but in

⁹ We would spend a week at my uncle's cottage on Lake Memphremagog near the Quebec/Vermont border every summer and at night we could pull in a Vermont television station on the black and white television. The picture would be snowy, but watchable. In the summer of 1967, I watched the summer rerun of the episode "The Devil in the Dark". There was a thunderstorm outside and the picture was extra snowy and it scared me shitless. This was the only episode of Star Trek that I saw when the series was actually on the air -- however, I would watch the entire series years later when it was in syndication and when we also had cable.

reality is (as should be expected), a morality play of that time -- the early 1970s. Yes, it has strong potential. But, it is also flawed. One of the biggest flaws being the complete and total lack of culture shock on the part of the character Devon (I don't care how big a rebel and free thinker he is within the Neo-Amish culture of Cypress Corners, he was nevertheless enculturated/socialised within that restrictive culture; the world outside his dome is going to unseat everything that he knows, possibly even his own free-thinking heretic views) -- he adjusts far too well. ¹⁰

If anyone ever reboots this series, it will have to be heavily updated. It would have to be made for a specialty channel as a limited serial (the standard for European television drama) as opposed to a broadcast television episodic series. And it would have to -- and this is the hardest part -- receive the blessing of Ellison. Which means, it isn't going to happen. After all, Ellison threatens litigation over any story/film/television programme/webseries that comes anywhere within a centimetre of being remotely similar to *The Starlost*.

And here comes the rant... Ellison did not create the concept of the generation starship as an interstellar "ark" -- that honour goes to Tsiolkovsky and Bernal (and to a lesser extent to Goddard). The trope that the inhabitants of a generation starship will forget that they are on starship was first introduced in the 1940s and 1950s. The concept that the generation starship has gone off course (as well as the inhabitants forgetting that they are on a ship) first appeared in the 1960s. The only original concept that Ellison developed is that the generation ship is composed of multiple biospheres and multiple cultures (though Harrison sort of does this one -- with two cultures -- in the late 1960s) and that it is on a collision course with a star -- that's it, period. And yet, he behaves as if all of the above are his original concept and potential infringement of "Phoenix Without Ashes".

Well I have what was supposed to be a two novel series, sometimes called a diptych, that examines the same far future culture using two different modes of slower-than-light colonisation. Both encounter hazards en route that creates the major plot device, etc. In the first novel, they use a fleet of three colony ships each with 20,000 colonists in stasis. In the second novel, they

¹⁰ That said, this was written for episodic television of the 1970s -- you only have 50 minutes to play with here.

use a world ship -- a huge habitat, made up of many valleys (each with a distinct culture) separated by mountains -- that is off course and on collision course with the target star. Based on the astrogation notes, provided by my friendly neighbourhood astrophysicist at the local university that I also lecture at, you do aim your starship for where the target star will be during acceleration mode, and the fine tuning of your trajectory -- so that you don't actually collide with the star -- would be performed after turn-around and during deceleration.

However, the second novel will not be written, nor is it in the works, beyond the world-building stage. Because, even though there is no Neo-Amish culture, nor is the world ship called an "ark", nor are they fleeing the destruction of the Earth, nor do the inhabitants not know that they are on a world ship -- even with all of that, I think crucial, difference, there is this old guy in Sherman Oaks, USA that, based on previous recorded behaviour, I am fairly certain, will go positively apeshit claiming that I am infringing on his copyright, his concept, his intellectual property, as he unleashes the lawyers. And because I have studied and written about The Starlost, I cannot claim that I wasn't inspired by, or influenced by this man's written work. Perhaps, after the swine croaks, I may be able to write this -- depending on how litigious his estate is -- and perhaps then someone may be able to reboot The Starlost and do it properly.

In the meantime, Mr. Ellison, here's the single finger salute!

The Name Game

After six years of being a thorn in their side, where I have managed to publish/present under alternative academic affiliation, under a different name, under my own imprint, and so on, my employer has decided to actually behave like a post-secondary institution of higher learning. I am now permitted to publish/present using my own name and proper academic affiliation so long as the work is scholarly. So, from here on in, there will be no use of Neil Williams or James William Neilson, just my legal name, Neil Jamieson-Williams (note: SWILL is not scholarly and I make no mention of my academic affiliation in SWILL).

Pith Helmet and Propeller Beanie Tour

April 2015 Ad Astra - Toronto (actually, the wilds of Markham...)

