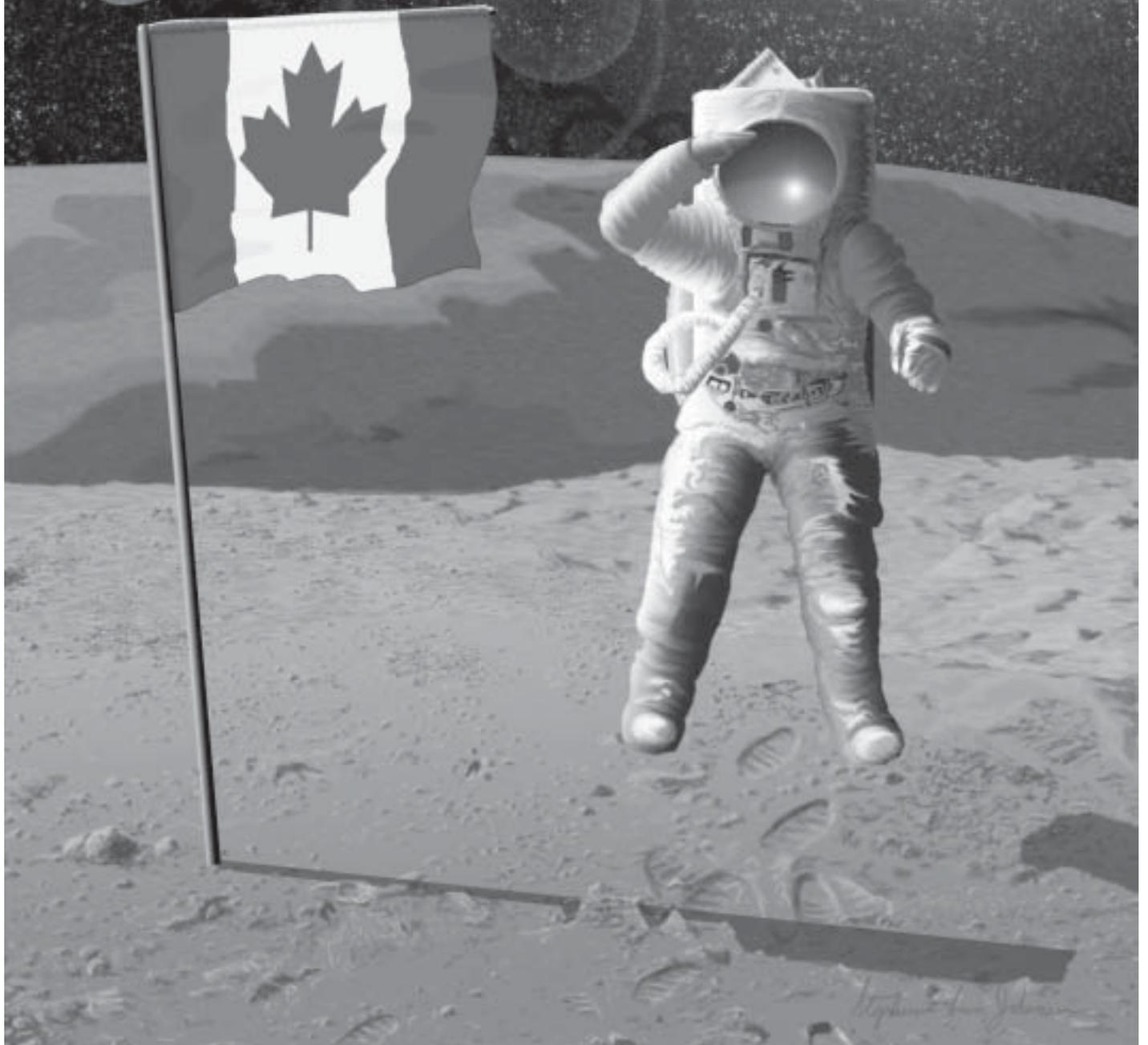


Under The Ozone Hole



Stephan van Johnson

UNDER THE OZONE HOLE

Number 16 - JULY 2005

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About the Cover

Stephanie Ann Johanson depicts the landing on the moon of the first Canadian astronaut, Chuck Fraser, on July 1, 1967.

Building on the success of the Avro Arrow, the Canadian space program surpassed that of both the American and Russian programs in the early 1960s.

Well, we can dream, can't we?

Stephanie is the Art Director of the science fiction magazine Neo-opsis: www.neo-opsis.ca

Artwork

Myles images on pages 4 and 7 by Dan Cawsey; Worldcon '89 logo on pages 5 and 7 by Chris Mundigler. Karl's Cartoon on Page 2 by Karl Johanson.

Photo Credits

The photo on page 26 of Karl Johanson and Robert Charles Wilson taken by John W. Herbert.

The photo of Judith Merrill on page 27 is courtesy of Annette Mocek, resident techie of The Merrill Collection.

KARL'S KARTOON!



The Editor's Opinion

by John W. Herbert

My first experience with fanzine was being involved in the instant creation of the first (and only issue) of **The Electric Gang-Bang Pork Chop**. Bernie Klassen's friend Derek was in town, so we all got together at Paula's and Bernie's place on John Street. Bernie pulled out his mimeo machine and a couple of stencils and we each took a whack at that now antiquated machine called a typewriter, and then Bernie rolled off some copies and – ta-da! – instant zine!

At the same time, Garth Spencer was producing **Maple Leaf Rag** also with mimeo. I can't imagine how much effort he put into it at its height, as he managed to keep it on a monthly schedule and still maintain such a high quality of reporting. But he did.

I entered fandom at the moment where mimeo was dying and computers were taking over. The first **Worldcon '89 at Myles' House** flyers were done on mimeo, but the first zine I put together (**Sneology** – the first **Worldcon '89 at Myles' House** update) was three double-sided pages long, all produced on my computer (which I think was a TRS-80). One page was photocopied, the other two printed on Bernie's mimeo. Now the mimeo has vanished into the deep ocean of obsolescence. Every other zine I've been involved with since then (**Worldcon '89 Updates**, **The Atavachron**, **Why You Got This Zine**) has been photocopied (with the exception of various issues **Raspberry Drinkzine** – but that's another story).

I put together the first issue of **Under the Ozone Hole** on a small 286 computer with a tiny hard-drive, with what nowadays seemed like nil RAM, and a tiny 12-inch monitor. I put this issue together on a Pentium with a huge hard-drive (that I still managed to fill up), oodles of RAM, and a 17-inch monitor. None of the new articles or contributions in this zine were ever put to paper until I printed the final copy of the zine. All submissions were submitted electronically (which saved me a lot of typing), including a photograph. Some of the artwork is almost 20 years old, and was scanned off the zines they originally appeared in.

It's strange to imagine, but there's more computing power bringing you this issue of **Under the Ozone Hole** than took Armstrong and Aldrin to the moon.

The preceding section was mostly written round about five years ago, as I tried to put together a "best of issue" of **Under the Ozone Hole** for Y2K. (You remember Y2K, don't you? When civilization was going to grind to a crashing halt and planes were going to fall from the sky because computers couldn't deal with the year rolling over to 2000? How quaint we were last millennium.)

Karl Johanson originally came up with the name of **Under the Ozone Hole**. We decided to do a zine that we would want to read. The idea was to try and be a "newszine" in the tradition of **Maple Leaf Rag** or **MLR**. But I think we failed in that regard. How timely can your news be if you're only pubbing once every three months? What we did, I hope, was entertain, make you think, and make you laugh. Maybe we even made you ponder. We sure didn't convince many people to send us money! ☺

We published the first issue in 1992. Funny how 13 years can disappear with a blink. And talk about changes in our lives! Back then Karl worked for the provincial government and I ran a small business. Now, in 2005, Karl runs a small business and I work for the government!

Anyway, I was considering publishing a "best of **UTOH**" issue, reprinting some articles, follow ups on some other articles, some new reviews, and maybe a new article or two. As it turned out, I surprised myself, and I was able to gather enough material to do a full new issue.

And in point of fact, I did get the issue assembled. I just never got around to actually printing it until now. And so it goes.

In the interim of the last five years, technology has grown leaps and bounds again. This zine is being distributed in a paper version, but will also be distributed electronically as a PDF file, and the articles will be available at the **UTOH** website: undertheozonehole.blogspot.com.

What you hold in your hand (with the exception of some minor tweaking) is akin to a newly discovered relic, an archaeological fannish treasure dropped through a time warp. Most of the articles, while they might be new to you, are at least five years old, written back in the days of yore when there was still hope that Lucas might turn the **Star Wars** series around with Episode 2 – what was the title for that one again?

Actually, it's a bit of an amusing trip, comparing the way the future turned out to the way future should have been. One of our LoCcer's mentioned he's just upgraded to 32 megs of RAM. Those were the days. I mentioned somewhere that the Vancouver Canucks have just signed Mark Messier. Well, we all know how that turned out. I also reviewed the 1997 **Star Wars** Special Editions and complain about Lucas's penchant for re-editing and revising his old films. Seen **Star Wars** on DVD lately? Or **THX-1138** for that matter? Nice to know some things never change. (In fact, none of the original theatrical versions of any of the **Star Wars** movies are available on DVD. Lucas has even tweaked the films of the prequel trilogy between their theatrical runs and their home video appearances. But I digress.)

So why publish all this if it's so old? Partly to clean off old business. This stuff is done – might as well let it out and hopefully some of you will be amused or interested. It is also 20 years since I was dragged kicking and screaming out of the fannish closet, so this is an anniversary of sorts. I also turn 42 this year, so if being that particular age isn't enough to spur on a flurry of fanac, then I don't know what age would be.

Whither **Ozone Hole**? I hope not. Hopefully this is the end of one chapter and the beginning of another. Go to the **UTOH** website (undertheozonehole.blogspot.com). We're building up an archive of material from the first run of **Ozone Hole** and well as new stuff, plus links, news items and convention listings. Check it out, and leave a comment or three.

But for now, send your mind back to those thrilling days of yesteryear.... before weapons of mass destruction or presidents of mass deception... before Martha Stewart wasn't a criminal... when you couldn't possibly imagine anyone making a movie out of *The Lord of the Rings*... when you still had your hair... when sitting provincial premiers who are convicted of drunk driving did the honourable thing and resigned... when gasoline was only 70 cents a litre... before Billy Ray Cyrus was the Next Big Thing.... before you didn't laugh out loud whenever someone mentioned Stockwell Day... when Keanu Reeves's most famous role was Ted "Theodore" Logan... before "house" was something you lived in and not danced to... when **Star Trek** didn't suck – as much.... before the time that pre-historic monsters ruled the earth (but enough about George W. Bush)...

undertheozonehole.blogspot.com

The Way The Future Should Have Been: *(Gunderson, Worldcon, Goats – Oh My!)*

by John W. Herbert

It was the event that rocked Fandom to its very foundations – twisted it, shook it, dismantled it, and reassembled it. Paralleling the real-life transformations occurring at the same time in Eastern Europe, another legendary event forced an unexpected, surprising and, ultimately, an unsure and evolving revolution on Canadian Fandom.

For it was sixteen years ago, as the Soviet Bloc began its disintegration, that Fandom entered into the abyss and emerged as a different creature on the other side. What began as Fandom's annual party became an epoch-shattering maelstrom of grave soul searching and frantic debauchery. It was simply **Worldcon '89 At Myles' House**.

We start at the beginning, and for **Worldcon '89 At Myles' House**, the beginning was Robert Gunderson.

In 1952, in a tiny, run-down ramshackle of a house on the wrong side of the tracks, with a leaky roof, cracked window panes, and broken shutters, a lone dog howled under a crescent moon. In March of that year, this poverty-stricken family welcomed a new life into this world. A small, beautiful boy with tiny hands and fingers, but big, bright eyes that shone like blue suns. He was the apple of his father's eyes, and the baby's smile warmed his mother's heart. He was a perfect baby. He hardly ever cried, ate when he was supposed to, even slept when he was supposed to.

Their shack was next to the old CN line, and every night ol' 342 would come through, two miles of grain cars bound for Vancouver, clickety-clack, clickety clack, sounding a thunderous roar that shook the cardboard shingles off the roof of their shack. After the train had passed every night, Dad would go outside and try to replace the cardboard shingles by stapling them back in place, but most times they couldn't afford staples so he would just lick them into place. (In the winter, it was easier. Dad would just spit into a bucket all day and come nightfall, he would pour the bucket of spit over the roof and freeze the shingles in place.)

But the next night, ol' 342 would return, like a mobile earthquake snaking along the ground, tremors rattling, subsonics shaking, and a rumble rumbling that you could hear in your stomach and feel in your bones. But through it all, through the sharp squeals of steel wheels on steel tracks, through the bleating blasts of the train's horn, through the sudden bright bursts of light as the train's headlight shone through the hole in the wall where the living room window ought to have been, the little baby slept all night, with nary a whimper nor a dream disturbed. Five blocks away from this family lived ten year-old Robert Gunderson. And it was Gunderson who would eventually take Canadian Fandom down its most wildest trip.

Not much is known about Gunderson's early years, save that his father installed in him a deep love of goats. In one of his few known interviews, Gunderson described his first encounter with science fiction: "I was at high school one day and my Business Sabotage teacher dragged me into an empty classroom. My first thought was, 'Oh no, not again,' but she had a film projector set up and somehow she had managed to obtain a bootlegged copy of 2001. So we watched it. And I thought, hey, here's a film with no dialogue. Wow, that'll make writing screenplays easier, not having any dialogue. But the really puzzling thing was that it was, what? 1968? Yeah, 1968, and so here I was 26, eight novels published, and I was still going to high school." (**The Monthly Monthly #25**).

He quit school and hit the road, as many young people did in 1968, with Kerouac in one pocket and not a care in the other. He eventually made

it to the legendary Woodstock concert later that year where he even managed to emcee the show for a while, using the stage name Lumpy Gravy.

By this time, though it seemed he was young and carefree, Gunderson had already established a considerable literary reputation. "Gunderson [was] one of those unsung outlaw heroes of SF and of modern culture," observed noted ex-Saskatchewanian Dave Panchyk in **Under The Ozone Hole Number Ten**. "[H]e spent his childhood at the knee of the aging 'Great Beast,' Aleister Crowley, then went on to move in the same literary circles as William S. Burroughs at the end of the fifties, while he was still barely more than a teenager. It [was] at this point he wrote *The Space Inside* and *Mymidon*, two seminal classics now out of print." Clearly, in his youth Gunderson was a talent to watch. But what happened? Panchyk has a theory: "*Golgotha on Mars*, his stunning third novel, appeared several years too early for him to become a hero of the New Wave. Had he not

been more proud than Philip K. Dick, who kept himself alive with pot-boilers, he would have eclipsed that man's talent."

So Gunderson was too young to be Old School, but too old to be New Wave. Clearly, luck and fate were factors here. But in December 1994 when Panchyk offered the above assessment, it was not known that Gunderson had indeed written more than his share of pot-

boilers and novelizations, most under various assumed names: John Norman, William Shatner, V.C. Andrews, Fabio, and Alan Dean Foster. This information has only come to light since his passing by the release of various documents by the NSA and Interpol. (The only novel to appear after 1975 with the Gunderson moniker was *Charlie's Angels: Angels in Chains*. This was a printer's error and recalled immediately, and reprinted with the byline "Max Franklin." A Gunderson *Charlie's Angels* is extremely rare and valuable.)

By the mid-seventies and into the eighties and nineties, he was reduced to writing media tie-in novels (*Chekov Must Scream!*), and ghost writing novels by others (George Lucas). But why did he fall in with this group of degenerates instead on any other? Again, Panchyk offers some insight. "[Gunderson] was a degenerate, certainly. And yes, he killed." All the more curious in light of the events that conspired to keep Gunderson from actually attending **Worldcon '89 At Myles' House**.

But we are ahead of ourselves. After Woodstock, Gunderson vanished from sight for a number of years, until he turned up in Edmonton in the early seventies. In a profile by **Worldcon '89 At Myles' House** alumnus Sally Mander in **Under The Ozone Hole Number Five**, Gunderson recalls (in his final interview) stumbling into an ESFACAS meeting in Edmonton quite by accident: "Somehow, a rug on the floor got rolled up and I tripped over it." He also recalled that "...all the famous ESFACASians were there: Silvestri, Williams, Horner, Steiner, Goldenthal, and Badalamenti – before her breakdown, of course."

This initial meeting which brought together Gunderson and ESFACAS is well remembered in Edmonton Fannish circles. Robert Runté remembers it well: "Gunderson stormed into the room like a race car on

"[Gunderson] was a degenerate, certainly.

And yes, he killed."

– Dave Panchyk



nitro. He dominated the meeting. He was one of those people that just drew you in. You couldn't not look at him. Magnetic. There was a fire behind his eyes that blazed like hot coals that last an eternity. Plus, he could speak Esperanto so we could finally watch our copy of *Incubus* and figure out what was going on! At least, that's what Randy Reichart told me that some guy who might have been there said."

Cath Jackel remembers every detail of that meeting vividly: "I wasn't there."

It is interesting to note that Gunderson, who up until this point had kept his contacts with fandom to a minimum, knew of the reputations of the these people, who are the equivalent of the First Fandom of ESFACAS. Obviously he was keeping abreast of the fannish world, even if he himself was not an active participant. This was about to change. He continued, "I suppose none of the young people today remember these guys now, but they started ESFACAS, and they made ESFACAS tick. They were its heart and soul. It's a good thing I never joined."

In 1977, Gunderson moved to Vancouver to attend McGill University. Unfortunately, McGill is in Montréal. While earning money to move to Montréal at a lesbian S&M club, Spikes 'n' Dykes, Robert met Monika Bandersnatch, part-time waitress and full-time deviant. She in turn introduced him to Angst Philben, former CIA weapon specialist, and the three of them discovered they shared two mutual interests: sf and goats.

The three of them bonded instantly, thanks in part to a terrible glue accident, but even despite that, there is no question they were three kindred spirits. Gunderson: "Well, Angst and Monika got on real well, and after I'd been over to their place with my video camera a few times, they let me in on their BCSFA plans. They said fandom needed a place to go to celebrate fannishness and goats. They said BCSFA would be the ideal way to do it! Wow! Our own club! Then they let me in on their plans for having a Worldcon in 1989.

They even had a name for it: **Worldcon in 1989**. So we started having meetings, and formed an arsenal and stuff at their place while we installed the pulleys and winches. It was great! That's where we met Bill Froog."

Although Froog was later to play a significant role during **Worldcon '89 At Myles' House**, for now he remains a small player in our story. It is Angst Philben, speaking to this reporter exclusively only on the condition that I guarantee his anonymity, who now continues the story. "Someone said that some other group was called BCSFA. So I called up Len and said, 'Are you gonna give us any trouble?' He said no, but this other group was already called BCSFA. They had the name first. Well, we were devastated. We didn't know what to do."

There was little the group could do. Only a large-scale assault could solve the problem. Angst quickly built up the arsenal, Monika gathered the whips and chains, Gunderson wrote *Welcome Back, Kotter: Barbarino Flunks Out*, and Bill made cookies. But even though their claim to the name BCSFA was in jeopardy, their Worldcon plans continued unabated. For a while, it seemed that **Worldcon in 1989** was going to rest simply on the fannish laurels of the Gunderson name. For although it was clear that Philben was the more heavily armed, it was Gunderson who was the filthy pro. But soon, a slight navigational error was to change **Worldcon in 1989** forever.

The night of the raid finally came. BCSFA historian R. Greame Cameron, citing several fannish sources of the era, describes what happened in **BCFSazine #234**. "At the time, BCSFA met on the first Sunday of every month. Now for some reason, a group of people in a car drove by the clubhouse on the third Thursday of this particular month. What was really strange was that they had a map out and were arguing over directions. The car sped by quickly, never stopped, and just kept going.

William Gibson, who as you recall was a member of BCSFA, just happened to be walking by at the time and said, 'Hey! Isn't that the guy who wrote *Golgotha*?'"

Angst Philben takes up the story: "Finally, we challenged them to a rumble, but they never showed, probably because we made a wrong turn in Delta and ended up on the ferry to Victoria."

And it was on this simple ferry ride that Robert Gunderson, Angst Philben, Monika Bandersnatch and Bill Froog met their destiny. It was here that fate cast to them both their salvation, and their destruction, a quest they should have refused, and yet a challenge they had to take. It was here, for the first time, that they met Myles Bos, goat farmer.

"We later made up this story about lightning bolts," said Philben, "and none of that happened but the air seemed charged with electricity when we met. And it was, actually. St. Elmo's fire. Good thing the ferry wasn't filled up with hydrogen."

"It was like people meeting for the very first time," said Bandersnatch. "You say hi, and then they say hi. And you don't know what else to say so you say hi again and smile like a moron."

Gunderson never talked about this first meeting much but clearly the others thought he was excited. Myles was a goat farmer, and Gunderson could now see ways to combine his two passions, sf and goats, in ways that he never before imagined while not sleeping.

Myles was excited, too. In a recent interview in **ConTRACT**, he said, "My lawyer has advised to make no comment at this time."

As the group exchanged banal chit chat, Gunderson's mind was racing. How to tie together goats and sf? Except for those wild parties at **V-Con**, it had never been done successfully before! But it was when Myles casually mentioned that his family had a small goat farm that he saw it all.

"[Gunderson] suddenly screamed," said Philben. "I thought he was in pain, like maybe

he'd eaten some ferry food or something. But no! He'd had an idea! '**Worldcon '89 At Myles' House!**' he shouted. 'Goats! Goats! Goats!' When he started shouting about goats, once again I was sure he'd had some ferry food!"

Well-known cynic E.B. Klassen offers a much different version of events. "Look, I started it, okay? I was thinking out loud around a table at Mac's 24 Restaurant that conventions were just getting too big. 3,000, 4,000 people – who needs that? Why not something smaller, more personal, more intimate? So I thought of having a con in Sooke. And someone else, it may have been Steph[anie Johanson], maybe Karl [Johanson], I dunno – it was four in the fucking morning! – anyway, someone said that Myles had a farm! And goats! Well that was it! We cooked that one for a good couple of hours and then John [Willcox Herbert] took it all home and made up the original **Worldcon '89 At Myles' House** flyer and the rest is history. We made buttons, hats, updates – sometimes we got worried that we may actually have to put this thing on. Eventually we even told Myles about it."

Klassen's revisionist version of events is interesting because this "group" he describes were not the only ones to try and steal credit for **Worldcon '89 At Myles' House**, but they certainly were the most famous. In fact, certain members of this "group" (Dan Cawsey, Karl Johanson and John Willcox Herbert) kidnapped Myles and forced him against his will to appear on **The Ether Patrol** radio show, where they were interviewed by Barry Rueger. Clearly, this was a desperate act by a bunch of poor, wretched souls who could only gain the most marginal moments of self-worth by attaching themselves to a grand and glorious idea that they wished had been their own. In fact, this group of reprobates were seen at numerous mid-1980s conventions with a flimsy cardboard *faux*



Myles which they attempted to pawn off as the real thing. They even went so far as chair a panel at **V-Con 14**, where they insisted they were the driving force beyond “Myles-Mania.” (A tape recording of this travesty was made, but, sadly for the lovers of justice, it is said to have gone missing, much like Kennedy’s brain.)

And for those who still believe the fantasy tales of this group of fannish wannabes, it was no less an intrepid journalist than Garth Spencer himself who first broke the story of the cardboard Myles in the almost near legendary **Maple Leaf Rag #22**. After exhaustive research, he reported: “Through careful investigation, I have found the proof that there are two Myles Boses! Shocking, but true. The Myles we see at school and at official **Worldcon ’89 At Myles’ House** functions is bright, alert and waves his hand constantly. The other Myles, the one we see picking through garbage cans, sleeping beneath park benches, sneaking in the back doors of buses looks like death. He is the real Myles. The other one, the healthy, happy one, is made of cardboard.”

An outrage, to be sure. But clearly the Myles mythos was striking chords in fandom. As the cult of Myles’ personality grew, so did the unsolicited monetary contributions, the publicity, the mania, and the goat cheese. And so did the false claims of creation. But Spencer put most, if not all, of these claims to rest because of his massive effort and undercover work in what surely ranks as the pinnacle of fannish reporting in this country, **Maple Leaf Rag #22**. (Still, so intrepid were the forces of evil in this country that the story still persists to this day that the Myles-related stories in **Maple Leaf Rag #22** was in fact written by John Willcox Herbert, including a brief quote by E.B. Klassen, as he, as early as 1986, takes claim for the initial creation of **Worldcon ’89 At Myles’ House**: “...But really, the whole thing was my idea.” But we know that this is untrue, that Herbert did not nor will he ever possess the imagination capable of such fabrications, and that Klassen’s comments are only the words of a poor, deluded Albertan.)

It was Spencer who, even at this early stage, sensed the danger ahead and tried to shout warnings. His career is noted for being on the cutting edge of the sf convention subculture, and knowing its ins and outs. Convention organizers from across the nation (and yes, even Ontario) would constantly seek out Spencer for his advice and sage wisdom. His exposé of the **Constellation Con** affair would be his life’s work, and surely given his reputation, his word must be given credence and precedence over the ravings of nut cases like Klassen, Herbert and Johanson.

Spencer tried to make sense of it all in his editorial in **Maple Leaf Rag #22**. But he failed. Still, he offered these parting comments. “What really picks my bottom is the sheer stupidity of some people. I mean, I was here. I could have helped. They were flying blind. I have sight. I have vision.”

And now again, we are ahead of ourselves. Now we must turn to Myles: where did he come from?

Like Gunderson, our knowledge of Myles’ childhood years is now lost to the ages. But clearly, he was exposed to goats at an early age. The first **Worldcon ’89 At Myles’ House** flyer describes Myles as “...born into a family of goat herders. He knows everything there is to know about goats. He tried sheep once but it was to no avail. Goats were in his blood.” It is important to remember that Myles had rejected sheep – it is this fact that was to be the ultimate downfall of Myles, Gunderson, and the rest.

We must now look at the Myles/Gunderson relationship. In many ways, they were very similar. They both shared a love of science fiction, and suffered from terrifying bouts of goat lust. Yet they were also vastly dissimilar – Gunderson was nobody’s fool whereas Myles was everybody’s.

But the public was clearly taken with the Myles image. As noted previously, once Gunderson combined the ideas of an sf convention and goats, Myles became the obvious figurehead for the operation. **Worldcon in 1989** became **Worldcon ’89 At Myles’ House**.

And how did Gunderson take this sudden change in focus? With

Myles and his goats aboard, **Worldcon ’89 At Myles’ House** suddenly became a viable commodity, whereas riding on Gunderson’s coattails, **Worldcon in 1989** was going nowhere mighty fast. Now, it was different. The release of the initial **Worldcon ’89 At Myles’ House** flyer spawned worldwide interest. Letters were received from all over Canada, the United States, England, and even Australia. Everyone was shocked and amazed by the response, and no one more than Gunderson. And one can’t help but believe that he became insanely jealous.

In a transcript of a discussion in the rare unnumbered issue of **Maple Leaf Rag**, the stress of suddenly being relegated to number two in the pecking order was plainly evident. Consider this exchange:

GARTH SPENCER: But what about the Ringworld?

ROBERT GUNDERSON: Screw the Ringwormworld! It’s a very nice concept and all, but unless we make it off this dust ball, Ringworlds and Dyson spheres and Imperial stormtroopers and Mork & Mindy aren’t going to mean dick! Do you understand?

GARTH SPENCER: I’m not sure. I think you just insulted my favorite tv show.

ROBERT RUNTÉ: Has anything Gunderson said made any sense?

Part of this outburst can be explained by the fact that Gunderson was under pressure from Pocket Books whilst writing the *Mork & Mindy* novelization (under the name “Ralph Church”), but certainly not all. Gunderson’s ego was taking a beating at this time. Consider his comment to E.B. Klassen from the same transcript: “Just don’t preach your commie/left wing politics around us, you pinko.” Clearly, Gunderson was confused and mistaken, as Klassen has always been a well-known conservative, and currently serves as the Agriculture critic in the new Conservative

Party shadow cabinet in Ottawa.

The conflict was taking its toll on Gunderson. In the **Worldcon ’89 At Myles’ House Update #1**, Gunderson interviewed Myles and the result was a tension filled and extremely uncomfortable dialogue.

ROBERT GUNDERSON: Whose idea was it that **Worldcon ’89 At Myles’ House** should take place at your house?

MYLES BOS: Yours, Robert. You know that.

GUNDERSON: Ah, Myles –

BOS: Why did you ask me that? The whole thing was your idea.

GUNDERSON: Myles, shut up. You –

BOS: Why are you here, anyway? Who let you into my bathroom? I’m trying to get a little privacy – Is that a microphone?

Obviously, there was no love lost. In an exclusive interview for this article, Myles finally volunteered to set the record straight. “My lawyer,” he said, “has advised me to make no comment at this time.”

Then, to add even more strain to Gunderson, there was the Lloyd Penny affair. Gunderson had decided to raise money for **Worldcon ’89 At Myles’ House** by auctioning off the position of Professional Guest of Honour (or ProGoH). Penny, a fan from Ontario, claimed to have sent money to the **Worldcon ’89 At Myles’ House** organizers (Gunderson) in a bid for the position. Gunderson never received any money. Penny took his complaints public. In the **Worldcon ’89 At Myles’ House Update #4**, he wrote “Yvonne witnessed it going in the envelope. What IS going on here?”

It was obvious what was going on. It was another attempt to wrest fame from **Worldcon ’89 At Myles’ House**. The proof was that Lloyd was supporting a rival group from the United States.

“Pennygate” proved to be the final straw for Gunderson. He went to Ottawa for a vacation, claiming he needed rest and recuperation. Instead, it was just another bizarre turn in the life (and deaths) of Robert Gunderson.

Late in the evening August 4, 1985, at the height of the **Worldcon '89 At Myles' House** feeding frenzy, his rented canoe was found floating upside down on the Rideau Canal. A large piece appeared to be bitten out of it. Gunderson himself was missing and presumed eaten.

Fandom was shocked. Bandersnatch, Philben and Froog were equally shocked. Ichthyologists were shocked that there were sharks in the Rideau. Myles, experimenting with electricity at the time, was shocked perhaps most of all.

Always eloquent, Candas Jane Dorsey perhaps said it best for everyone: “Wasn't there something in the **Esquire** about man-eating sharks in Ontario or something? Didn't I read that somewhere....? I dunno.”

Worldcon '89 At Myles' House was now in serious trouble. Myles, although immensely popular, was clearly just a figurehead and not capable of taking over the day-to-day operation of the convention. Behind the scenes, Froog, Philben and Bandersnatch bickered and fought. A public façade of normality was maintained, but it was a cheap charade – on the inside, everything was falling apart. Still, Myles struggled to hold it together. He was quoted at the time saying, “My lawyer has advised me to make no comment at this time.”

The stress of it was getting too much even for Myles. In a letter published in **Maple Leaf Rag**, he wrote “Garth, you've got to help me. These people are crazy. They really want to have Worldcon at my house. I've tried everything! I've tried ignoring them, I've tried playing along with them, I've tried Zen. I've even moved – twice!! Nothing's worked!”

Myles was clearly being pushed to the edge by forces beyond his control. His mind was snapping. “They know where I live and where I go to school and they always follow me. Sometimes they hide in the shadows or trail behind me at a discreet distance. Sometime they don't hide at all! They brazenly walk out in daylight and everyone knows they're following me but no one helps me. And sometimes, I never see them at all. But I know they are out there.... watching.... waiting....”

Myles abandoned the project. Saving his money, he stowed away on a passing cruise ship as it sailed to Nepal.

The internal struggles within the remains of the concomm continued, and finally it was Froog who emerged as the head of the survivors, who now maintained an uneasy alliance. But a rival group, working all this time behind the scenes, were now ready to make their move.

The rival group of science fictions fans was called the IFS. This moniker, they claimed, stood for “Imaginative Fiction Society,” but secretly it stood for something more sinister. For this group harboured a dark, dank secret. They were sheep lovers. They loved sheep. A lot. An awful lot. You could say they were close to sheep. Very close. Whenever they could. Without getting caught.

The IFS group, lead by a Scottish sheep farmer, whose initials were David Gordon-MacDonald, were fanatical anti-Goatists, and they stopped at nothing and stooped to anything to discredit the **Worldcon '89 At Myles' House** endeavour.

They attempted to recruit Adam Charlesworth to their ranks. He recently recalled, “No, John, I have a life. I'm not going to talk about this

anymore. It's over. I'm out of fandom. People can make the break and carry on. You don't see E.B. Klassen's name in fanzines anymore, do you?”

E.B. Klassen also recalls, “The IFS sabotaged everything. Once they got that after hours petting zoo going, well, **Worldcon '89 At Myles' House** was toast. Nothing got done because Froog and Philben were spending all their time at the petting zoo.”

And so **Worldcon '89 At Myles' House** petered out and faded away, a victim of entropy and ennui. And where are they now? Bill Froog invested in Netscape and made a fortune. Monika Bandersnatch changed her name to Kim Campbell and went into politics. Angst Philben played steel guitar in Tommy Hunter's band for a while, but then moved into the gold-mining business with a company named Bre-X. Currently, he is living under the name “Brian Mulrone” somewhere in the Cayman Islands. Myles, as noted, eventually settled in Nepal, and now makes a meager living there as a part-time yak racer and a Microsoft network technician.

(Despite what transpired, today he has only kind words to say about the whole affair: “My lawyer has advised me to make no comment at this time.”)

And how has the **Worldcon '89 At Myles' House** affair affected the next generation of Fandom? Roy Fisher put it most succinctly: “Well, I didn't know any of those guys, and really, I'd never heard of any of it. It had no discernable effect on me at all. I have nothing more to add. I just haven't heard of it. Who are you, anyway?” Michelle Wilson remembers her family gathering around the fire, once a year, as the tale was told and passed down through the generations. “Yes, my family sure loved *A Christmas Carol*. But who was this Myles guy?”

And the whole affair still resurfaces occasionally in the fannish media. “You are NOT going to like what I will be saying about it,” John Mansfield recently told the editors of **Under the Ozone Hole**.

But the final twist of our tale is the strangest of all. In 1993, Robert Gunderson resurfaced, apparently alive. In **Under the Ozone Hole Number Five**, he was reluctant to discuss the incident, claiming that when he was attacked in his canoe, he struck his head on something underwater and developed amnesia. “The next

thing I remember is waking up in 1993 as the Reform MP from High River!” He denied rumours about being involved in a nefarious plot in Central America, insisting that all those pictures of himself with Oliver North were fakes.

Fake pictures or not, the rise of poorly written media tie-in novels during Gunderson's disappearance suggests that if he was in Central America during that time, he was continuing his chosen career as a writer. He continued writing until his untimely death in June 2001, in a strange and as yet unexplained inner tube rafting accident in the Gorge waterway in Victoria, BC. His body was never recovered. Only the inner tube was found. It was damaged and torn with what appeared to be strange bite marks....



“My lawyer has advised me to make no comment at this time.”

-- Myles Bos

Littleton, Taber, and the Cult of Ironic Detachment

by E.B. Klassen

It's the dirty little secret that television news doesn't want to talk about. That the news certainly can affect people's lives. Like the kids in *Littleton* and *Taber*, the latest in a series of copycat murders that stretch back over the last two years. That murder is good for a quick buzz in a culture so media-saturated, according to Alanna Mitchell in the *Globe and Mail*, that Porta-potties were set up around the school in *Littleton* before the media hordes had even arrived. The secret that yes, the media (and in particular, the TV news) do bear a responsibility for the actions of loners and lunatics.

It's the dirty little secret that video game manufacturers don't want to talk about. That the intense violence of high-rez, first-person, splatterpunk games do serve to desensitize players to violence and death. That the Pavlovian linking of visual gore and adrenaline rush do in fact have a negative effect on society. The secret that yes, video games do bear a responsibility for the actions of loners and lunatics.

It's a dirty little secret that parents really don't want to talk about. That we have abandoned our kids to a world of brutality and horror without help, support, or guidance. That malls and the media are raising our kids more than we are. The secret that the bareness of the world we are forcing on our children is nothing more nor less than a reflection of the bareness within ourselves.

It's no secret to the weapons manufacturers, however. They know damned well that the tools they make kill people. That murder is just one of the inadvertent spin-offs of acceptable market penetration. There's no secret there at all—just denial.

But none of these are the causative agent behind the murders in *Littleton* and *Taber*. Training and conditioning are not sufficient in and of themselves; they lack the necessary element of desire, of need. Each of these symptoms reflect an underlying malaise, a illness in the culture that spawned them. An illness so well-rooted that its symptoms are no longer even noticed, but are rather accepted as part of the wallpaper of modern life.

People don't kill other people because they are happy or well-adjusted. Killing, like rape, is about power. Or rather, a lack of power. A kid well-integrated with his community, comfortable with his peer group, doesn't show up at the high school one day with a .22 and shoot a couple of students. The killer(s) is/are described as loners, those who don't fit in, the ones being selected against in the nightmarish social Darwinism of high school.

The power these kids lack is the power to alter their environment, to change the situation they find themselves in. Trapped, under pressure, being forced to perform acts they neither care about nor relate to, in an environment they have neither chosen nor desired, under conditions that are health and sanity threatening, they are just trying to survive until they reach an arbitrarily defined end-point that, while holding out the promise of relief, looks likely to just continue the torture in another arena. And the only philosophical structure they are offered for solace is one that states simply that "life is suffering. Only death brings release." That people find this unbearable is not astonishing. That more don't is astonishing.

When Ice-T or Tupac talk about bitches and hoes and grabbing my nine to pop a couple of caps in that mofo's ass, they claim that they are simply describing the reality around them. Certainly, one can't argue with this self-justification. That is the essential drive of the artistic impulse: to make the audience experience the artist's perceptions. But why then are so many fans white middle-class kids with no apparent life experiences in common with the artists?

Movies for adults have come close to disappearing off the theatre

screens of North America, being replaced with tales of lone gunfighters with progressively more elaborate personal armories, or stories of two lunatics meeting up and ripping a bloody swath through the local environment. What is it that audiences are responding to in these films?

The common underlying theme of so much of the modern arts seems to be that of powerlessness, even in the fantasies of individuals reclaiming power in a fiery explosion of flame and flying body parts. An inability to alter the political, social, or cultural environment seems to be the sensation we all have in common—and, perversely, it separates us, rather than unifying us. Much like modern communications technology...

When it does unify us, it does so around single issues or concerns. In its most basic form, it is people reclaiming the right to change anything in their environment—thus the rise in the last decade of body modification such as branding, tattooing, and piercing. These tribal practices serve as a substitute reintegration of individual and society, as the society being integrated with is a smaller subset of the larger one.

The de-closeting of sado-masochistic sexual practices such as bondage and domination can be seen in the same light. S&M is about power and its control by the involved individuals. The one word that is most often used to describe the results of coming out of whatever sexual closet is "empowering," which I find a fairly revealing choice.

We offer our kids choices; what kind of music to listen to, what type of clothes to wear, what political party to follow. We offer options in consumption—options that exist at the whim of the controlling class, options that can be revoked or changed at any time—and wonder why the kids seem dissatisfied. And put simply, it is because choices in consumption do not equate with involvement in the world. In the millions of years in our tribal past, we could affect our local environment. We were initiated into the mysteries of the universe, what we did mattered, who we were could change everything if we wanted it to. Now we have the cult of ironic detachment.

With the powerful commercial and political forces arrayed against our involvement in the life of our communities, cities, provinces, and countries, it is a miracle that the world isn't tearing itself to bits around us. Kids in *Littleton* and *Taber* see other kids empowering themselves with guns and death, and they too decide that a little empowerment would be a good thing. But, as is usual among the poor and disenfranchised, the anger and destruction is directed against the community around them. This is where they feel most of the pain and oppression are centered, so this is where they choose to strike back. When Watts burned, it was its own citizens that burned it. Again, during the aftermath of the Rodney King verdict, the fear that Hollywood Hills might burn drove the containment effort. No one cares if you burn your own neighborhood, its only the possibility that you might actually rise against the oppressor classes that inspires fear.

But the oppressor is distant and far away. The oppressor is faceless and unknown. So violence turns inward, toward the local, the visible, the touchable. So kids butcher kids in the inner city, the high schools, the malls. We re-tribalize, basing our new tribes on thin reasons like common interests, music, or race.

We've lost the ties of blood and we've lost the ability to focus on our similarities rather than our differences. Politics descends into us and them, and distractions like separatism (as if the right of the governed to choose by whom they will be governed had somehow disappeared over the years), rather than concerns like the public good. No one actually gives a damn whether kids kill kids except their parents and their local community. And the changes that could make a difference will remain undone.

Life and Death by Bob Bramwell

It's one of those rare days when I wax philosophical, so in the few sunny minutes between the end of the funeral and the next snowstorm I will lay some philosophical wax upon you. I've been following the leering and frothing on the campaign trail for the last couple of episodes, and let me say that for a fluffy fanzine you sure get into some heavy shit, man. I'm sure life has always been "like that", especially the frothing. If I stand well back from it the whole thing is ironically funny and quite interesting to watch. The problem is that it is almost impossible to stand far enough back.

Today's funeral was pretty good, as funerals go. It was so well attended that the sanctuary of the (admittedly small) church was filled to overflowing, and a few dozen of us attended vicariously from the room next door with piped-in sound. I don't imagine the name "Sue Soule" will mean anything to any of you, but it is easier to type "Sue" than "the deceased", and the fact that she was a real human being is an important constituent of the wax. She received many well-deserved posthumous compliments from the mourners. People quoted poetry, sang songs, played music, and talked about the things they remembered best about Sue. A lot of allusions to rivers, seas, mountains, clouds, birds, flowers and other natural phenomena were made, and in the process of trying not to turn into a puddle on the floor I suddenly realized something: there was not a single reference to business, cutbacks, deficits, welfare bums, crime, money (or lack thereof), the Internet, or virtually anything else that is supposed to concern us most of the time.

Why not?

Every day the news screams at us about how important all these things are. We spend most of our lives running in pursuit of some, and running away from others. And yet, at those times of our lives generally considered MOST important (births, deaths, marriages, the First Time) we turn to poetry, song, dance, and fields of daffodils. There's a message in there somewhere, and my interpretation is that we spend far too much time doing the wrong things for our own good.

Interestingly, though, I strongly suspect that there is a more cynical, more covert, and vastly more common interpretation. Bluntly put, that is "if it's not worth money it's not worth anything; if it IS worth money, it's worth exploiting". Let me add, in haste, that I DO NOT subscribe to this interpretation, but it leads to much frothing, some leering, and quite a lot of fear and loathing on my part.

The sort of thing I have in mind is this: I've decided I want to live somewhere peaceful. I see the ads in the paper for Green Acres, a new subdivision of the city with rolling hills, trees, people on horseback looking relaxed, tanned, and healthy. The air is crystal clear, the sky a cloudless blue, the lake transparent and alive with fish. Wonderful! Just what I want. So I sell the old homestead, mortgage the family, pawn the elephant, and move out. Fairly soon I am surrounded by like-minded people, all peacefully mowing their lawns with little tractors, riding their dirt bikes around the hills, water skiing on the lake, and driving 100Km into the mountains to get away from it all. Shortly afterwards earth moving equipment arrives a mile or so up the road, and with much roaring and crashing another news subdivision is born: the developers who sold me on this idyllic spot have moved on.

Some people get very rich doing the business thing in one way or another. They specialize in figuring out how to get the rest of us to pay them for the things that we value. THEY don't value them, of course, except in so far as they can make money off them. As soon as that ceases to be the case they pick on something else we value, and the cycle starts

again.

A few months ago my favourite radio station, CKUA, shut down quite suddenly purportedly to avoid going bankrupt. Patience please: this is not altogether a non-sequitur - at least, not in my scattered brain. CKUA is a publicly-owned, privately-operated broadcaster. The great Alberta Government wanted to be rid of it a few years ago, so they sold the entire thing (about \$800,000 worth of equipment and physical plant) to a private foundation, set up as a charitable organization, for \$10. \$4.7 million was handed out in the form of "grants" to allow it to make the transition to a user-pays organization. In the following years CKUA held fundraisers which have brought in close to a million dollars from listeners like me. The publicly-owned part is pretty clear, since that's where all the money has come from. Naturally, we (the listening public) assumed that this meant that we had some say in how the money was spent and how the foundation conducted its business. But, no, we didn't. The board of said foundation was so constituted that new members had to be voted in by a majority of existing members, and only the board has voting rights. Some of the board were drawing salaries of around \$150,000 a year. Charity begins at home, they say.

There are several connections between that little digression and what I was saying earlier. The first is pretty obvious: the business people saw a gravy train pulling out of the Alberta legislature and made damn sure we paid for their tickets. The second is that CKUA was one of the more accessible sources of music, song, poetry, literature, and other things associated with life's great experiences, but the people who made it into their business didn't value any of that.

The third connection is more obscure, partly because you need to know something I haven't mentioned yet. Thanks to the existence of the World Wide Web, when CKUA went off the air it was still possible for concerned people to communicate and to organize. A public Web forum soon started. One contribution to the discussion very nearly finished me off. It said "I wouldn't have voted for the PCs if I'd known this was going to happen". I couldn't decide whether to laugh myself to death, commit suicide, or pick up a sub-machine gun and take out a McDonalds. The Alberta government has a long history of making the public pay for the use of public property. Vast subsidies paid to ski hill operators and golf course owners to commercialize parts of the beautiful Kananaskis valley, privatization of many provincial parks, loans forgiven to Japanese pulp companies tearing up Alberta's northern forests. There have been major public outcries about much of this, but the government endures mostly thanks to gerrymandering of electoral boundaries. In many ridings the PC candidate gets in by a minority of the votes cast. Anyone who votes for such a government has to realize two things: one is that this is NOT representative of the public will, and the other is that they are giving tacit approval to the government's actions. From my perspective this amounts to helping the government pillage and exploit things I value. I can't even begin to express my disgust with people who do this so casually, so unthinkingly, even to their own detriment!

CKUA is actually back on the air fairly soon, thanks to a lot of people who cried foul and inundated the politicians with complaints and threats. That particular story has a happy ending. But what about the general picture? Pretty bleak from where I stand. I have to play the business game or starve, and they have no compunctions about allowing me the freedom

"Just Call Him 'Bill'"

by Laura Houghton

The story begins near Christmas 1996 (just before The Great Blizzard), when Monica's brother Ken read my poems and said, "You don't have one on killing slugs." I looked at him. "Nooooo," I said, carefully, the best way to speak to a madman. "Well, all the great poets I've read always seem to have a poem on killing slugs." Great poets. Mm. Boy had a way with words. So I sat down next day and tossed off a lighthearted little comparison between Albertan and British Columbian slugs, which eventually was titled "Sluggish."

In due course I shoved "Sluggish" into a stack of poems which Bernie Klassen was going to critique for me while he and Paula Johanson were in town. Bernie read it, started laughing, and informed me that he was going to keep that printout of the poem. Fine by me; I like that sort of critic. Then he showed it to Paula, who just happens to be one of the two editors of the upcoming seventh edition of *Tesseract*. She said I should submit it to her and Jean-Louis Trudel for *Tesseract*; she couldn't promise he'd like it as much as she did, but I might as well try.

Oo! Being invited to submit. Oo! Sure, sez I, and put it on my list of things to do.

Eventually Paula and Bernie returned to the really <censored> cold wilds of their farm in Alberta, and we began corresponding via e-mail. One day my inbox contained a note from Paula, saying that the sixth edition of *Tesseract* had a hole in it one poem large and they were looking for submissions in a hurry: she'd send in a poem if I did and here was the e-dress (or @dress, if you prefer). I figured that I would have no chance against Paula, who is verifiably *published* (picture little glowing lightbulbs around that word, if you will), but then again, what did I have to lose? I could still send "Sluggish" to Paula and Jean-Louis if Robert Sawyer and Carolyn Clink didn't accept it.

I typed in "Sluggish" and a polite cover note, shunted them off to Robert Sawyer, and life went on. I had been tantalized by Paula's statement that they would be letting people know in three or four days, since most journals take three months, according to my *Poet's Market 1997*. However, I figured that four days meant at least a week, and didn't check my e-mail every few hours.

Saturday the first of February came along, and I was desperate to escape from my roommates; they're good roommates but sometimes you really want some time on your own, and I was in a fairly glum and anti-social mood. I knew Karl and Stephanie and Monica were going canoeing on the flats, so I went *chez* Johanson and begged for the run of the house while they were out. They declined the offer of my firstborn, but permitted me to stay anyhow.

I wandered into the computer room to log on. *You have new mail*, said my account. I entered *mail*, and saw a note from Robert Sawyer at the top of my inbox. I opened the note. My eyes expected to read "Thank you for your submission. Unfortunately, we cannot accept it...." My eyes began scrolling across the letters, and saw, "We are pleased to accept your poem for publication—" My brain seized up. Start over, it said, start over. "We are pleased to accept your poem for publication in *Tesseract* 6—"

I screamed so loudly that Karl thought I must have seen a huge mouse in the computer room, and came to see what was the matter. Poor Karl; he got pounced upon and severely hugged while I babbled loudly into his ear about my poem having been accepted, at a frequency usually reserved for playing an LP at 45 rpm.

(Note to Art: you're too young to recognize this reference, so let me explain that in the old days, we used to listen to music that had been recorded on black plastic disks called "records," and you chose the

appropriate speed at which to revolve the turntable. Playing an "LP" at 45 rpm, a speed meant for "singles," resulted in a sound like Alvin and the Chipmunks. Wait—you don't know Alvin, either, do you? Oh well, look it up in your history book; I have a story to finish! Now stop interrupting.)

After deafening Karl, who still had the presence of mind to congratulate me, I sprinted outside to tell Monica and Stephanie. I didn't break their ribs, though I may have creaked them slightly, and the neighbours two doors down didn't hear me at all. Then they went canoeing, and I either e-mailed or left voicemail at subsonic frequencies for practically everyone I knew... certainly everyone I thought of.

But wait—there's more! Now how much would you pay?

We had a celebratory dinner at Sen-Zushi that night, and then we had another celebratory dinner at Karl and Steph's on Sunday, so we could round up more people. I asked Stephanie, recorder of all special occasions, if she would take a picture of Laura The Day After Her Poem Was Accepted For Publication, and she was kind enough to agree. (I carefully handpick my friends to make sure they're all fabulous, you understand.) We rounded everyone up—I poked my head into the computer room and said, "Art, we're having a cluster-fuck picture and we need you in it," and left while his bewildered screech of "What?!" floated out the door after me. Taking photos with everyone was much fun, especially the one where everyone knelt adorably at my feet as I blessed them.

Then, while waiting for dinner, I took a look at the copy of *Tesseract*² that Karl had retrieved for me to hold while we took the pictures. I read three very good poems by two poets I hadn't heard of, and was a little impressed that I had managed to bamboozle my way into such a calibre of book. Then I saw the names Candace Jane Dorsey and Elisabeth Vonarburg, and ulped somewhat, since I actually recognized them. But I didn't actually start saying, "Oh shit, oh shit, oh shit" until I saw, well—do the names William Gibson and Margaret Atwood ring any bells?

Monica very kindly pointed out that now "Maggie" would be reading *my* poetry. Oh sure, like *that* was going to calm me down. As for William Gibson, Adam Charlesworth reports, "Just call him 'Bill.'" I hold that pleasure in reserve still, but (picture me jumping up and down): I'm published! They took the very first poem I ever submitted, and they're gonna PAY me! I'm published, I'm published, I'm published!

Life and Death (continued from page 9)

to do just that. I can't afford a secluded island devoid of golf courses and dirt bikes, so I will always be at the mercy of the exploiters. I cannot, in short, get out of "the system" and go my own way.

The only consolation I have is knowing that I will have a Pyrrhic victory over the money grabbers. They will spend their lives taking my money so they can own cars, houses, little lawn-mowing tractors, power boats.... And when they die their eulogists will speak of mountains and seas, sing songs about rivers and trees, put flowers on their graves, and hope that they will Rest in Peace.

Ramming Speed

by John W. Herbert

I have some friends in the Green movement and naturally they are extremely anti-automobile. And let's face it, they're absolutely correct. Our 21st century love affair with the car may be the death of us all. Noxious emissions that poison the air, acres of pavement, an expensive and wasteful infrastructure, and a staggering reliance on fossil fuels are the sad legacy of the automobile, to say nothing of the daily horrific carnage on the roads and highways. But in their crusade to curb the car, my Green friends may also be saving lives in a completely unexpected way. Of course, I'm referring to Justifiable Parkade Homicide.

When I'm driving in a parking lot searching for an empty space, I always try to be considerate to the other drivers. I don't stop in the middle of the row, blocking traffic, unless it's pretty obvious that someone is just about to pull out and free up a space. I don't stop and wait on the slight chance someone *may* return to their car in the next ten minutes. Sure, if you wait long enough, eventually someone's going to return to their car and free up their space right in front of you (unless the world ended while you were waiting and, boy, wouldn't you feel stupid then?). But is it worth the impotent aggravation of just sitting there doing nothing? I say if you can't find a place to squeeze into where you are, you should move on and look for somewhere else to park it.

Other people don't feel the same way as I do. Some feel it's their right to hold up as many other drivers as possible while waiting for a parking space to be vacated. Pedestrians don't do this. How many times have you seen a person stand in the middle of the sidewalk blocking other pedestrians on the slight chance that a space may open up at the bus stop?

I was recently a passenger in a friend's car in the View Street Parkade in Victoria. As we entered a new row of parked cars, he stopped his, apparently intent on waiting. It didn't help that this particular level of the parkade was also used as a pedestrian thoroughway. Office workers on their way to be late back from lunch scurried by, tantalizing us by walking past the parked cars. After ten minutes, my friend noticed my annoyance, manifested by my tapping the dashboard loudly. And not in time to the beat of the music on the radio.

"We can wait," he said. "We're not in a hurry." This was a debatable point. Did I really want to waste ten minutes crammed in a car so my friend could walk fifty feet to the exit instead of a hundred? (If I was a professional, I could have charged him by the minute for wasting my time.)

"Yeah, but what about the guy following us?" I asked. A car had driven into view behind us. "He might be in a hurry."

"He isn't. He hasn't passed us."

I glanced outside our car. My friend had somehow maneuvered it so it blocked the entire passage. I can just imagine what the guy behind us was thinking, because I've thought it myself a hundred times: why isn't common sense a prerequisite for a driver's license? "He *can't* pass us," I said. "It's too narrow. You haven't left enough room for him to get around us on either side."

"Look, he's not even on our bumper," he said, checking his rear-view mirror and growing angry at my impatience. "He's way back there."

My friend was correct. The other driver was way back there. Then I sensed what he was up to. "He's making sure he's got enough room to achieve ramming speed," I said.

My friend was still very nonchalant about the whole business. But what if this guy had been a lawyer on his way back from lunch to be late for his first afternoon appointment. Now he was going to be *really* late, and it was our fault. "If he was actually in a hurry," my friend said, "he'd honk his horn."

I checked the other driver in the rear view again. I've never seen a face so red before. Or such foaming at the mouth. Or a windshield fog up so fast. "He's too busy shaking his fists." I rolled down the window. "He's also making a comparison between your family lineage and exotic farm animals."

I'm not telling you this simply to embarrass my friend. That's only part of the reason. It's also to save his life. One day, he's going to pull this stunt on a disgruntled postal worker and that'll be it – out comes the Uzi and my friend is gonna be Hyundai Helper. The worst part is that no jury in the world would convict the killer. We've all been there, right? Justifiable Parkade Homicide. (With my friend's luck, the judge will turn out to be that poor guy we delayed. "I remember the victim well. RJK 042. As a judge, I can't condone violence or vigilantism, but the bastard had it coming.")

So remember, don't plug up traffic in a parkade waiting for a space to open. You're annoying people, wasting fuel, and polluting the planet. The life you save might be your own.



"But how is 'terrorism' going to surrender? It's well known, in philological circles, that it's very hard for abstract nouns to do anything at all of their own volition."

-- Terry Jones

LETTERS OF COMMENT

Editor's Note:

The following were LoCs received for *Under the Ozone Hole* Number 15. The reply comments are from the co-editors of *UTOH* 15, namely myself (J.W.H.) and Karl Johanson (K.J.)
Better late than never....

Don McCaskill
falcon@horizon.bc.ca
www.horizon.bc.ca/~falcon/

John and Karl,

I just received *UTOH* Number 15 and boy, do I feel younger already. I'm glad to see that the BC Bloc was out in force in Calgary, and that *UTOH* won the Aurora for the fourth year in a row. But I thought it was all agreed to vote for Garth Spencer's latest rag. Oh well, at least *Reboot* won for Best Use of Expensive Technology.

What is that rat doing on page six?

Glad to see more Canadian SF web sites listed, but Robert Runté mentioned Robyn's web page with photos of all from *Conversion*, but there's no mention of Robyn's web address. What is it?

Karl, loved the radish balls, but at 423 Kelvin I busted my Hobart. One possibly fatality saving tip you forgot was to let them warm before serving.

Well, I'll keep in touch.

{{Oooooo. You broke your Hobart. Better put some ice on that, man. Lucky you didn't snap that sucker off. Oooooo. You ain't gonna be walking straight for a month. I dropped the toilet seat down on my Hobart when I was a little kid. Ow, the memories.

Block voting? I must have messed up last time. I voted for *BCSF*azine.

No, Nicoli Tesla invented the radio before Marconi.

Thanks for the cheese.

— K.J.}}

{{Thanks, Don, for our first ever fax. Golly, we sure feel high tech now! ☺

I thought the plan was to vote for *The Monthly Monthly* — that way everyone would be confused.

The rat is holding a sign. What do you think it's doing, playing with its Hobart?

We tried to find Robyn's page too, but couldn't. And, apparently, the pictures weren't posted for very long anyway.

And not only did Henderson score the winning goal in Game Eight, he also scored the winning goals in Game Six and Seven, plus the

tying goal in Game Three. The man should be given the Order of Canada!

And thanks for the cheese!

— J.W.H.}}

Harry Cameron Andruschak
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Received *UTOH* Number 15 sometime last weekend, which was also the weekend for *Corflu*, from which I have just returned. *Corflu* was sort of fun, but the side effects of my new high blood pressure pills took a toll. Beta Blockers, the same sort Walt Willis has been having problems with, which I suppose makes it fannish. Still a bother.

I am currently off the Internet, and will probably stay that way until I get a new computer or can dream up some other valid excuse for not joining the Internet. (Other than the truth which is that I've found most of it an utter bore and need to buy and learn how to use filtering software before I try again.)

Besides, everyone at *Corflu* was talking about their web sites, and informing me that my 486/66 was too slow for web walking. This is true. On the other hand, I bought that computer to play games, and it still does a fine job of that. I increased RAM from 8 to 32 meg, did some aggressive memory management, and can now play games like *SimTower*, *SimIsle*, *Civilization II* and *Afterlife* smoothly, if a bit slowly.

On to your editorials, and we come to the subject of what may or may not have been an indication that life may or may not have existed on Mars long ago. If it did, let us hope it was more intelligent than the current life on Earth. As an old Viking hand, I will stick to my bets that life does not currently exist on Mars. As for the past, I am dubious but could be persuaded with positive fossil evidence from a soil sample return mission.

To update my LoC, I never got around to attending the *Worldcon* (had far more important things to do) but did get to *Ditto 9* and *Orycon 18* late last year (read *Fosfax*?) and just came back from *Corflu 14*. These were my first cons since the 1993 *Corflu 10* and probably my last for the next few years. I need to save up money for a trip to Antarctica this November and a solar eclipse trip next February.

I need to take a nap. Yours aye....

{{The Internet boring?! Obviously you haven't tried www.aimnet.com/~carroll/oswald.jpg.

Karl just installed another 16 meg into his computer. Now I've got a severe case of RAM envy.

There's some thought that microscopic life may exist in the Martian permafrost. And sadly, you're right — there ain't no intelligent life down here.

Evel Knievel's greatest crash was his crack-up at Caesar's Palace. Boy, did he get clobbered — put his hip bone right through his pelvis. That's gotta hurt!

And thanks for the cheese!

— J.W.H.}}

Michael McAleese
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Thanks for sending the latest ish, John. I still don't know why I'm on the mailing list... David Hume still grouses that he doesn't get a copy mailed to him but I do, and he's the sf fan. Well... he's more fannish than me, anyway. Come to think of it, I haven't read a new SF novel in years. The shelves seem to be full of new-age fantasy and eco-feminist drivel every time I look, y'see. I had to track down the *Lensman* series in a second-hand bookstore to get a proper fix.

So, when will the fanzine move fully onto the web? Print is dead, you know. It's funny how SF fans are so slow to take advantage of the new technology... Ever notice how much the typical fanzine letter column feels like a really slow bandwidth newsgroup? Or is it the other way around?

{{*UTOH* will show up on the net one of these days. Print will never be dead — the web is just a different medium, that's all. A web version of *UTOH* will never supplant the print version of *UTOH*, and vice versa. It will just be something different. (We still have plans to make *UTOH: The Motion Picture* one day....)

SF fans may be slow to take advantage on the latest technology because a lot of them are so broke!

Yes, I hadn't considered subduction (or the lack thereof) as a reason that Mars never developed an oxygen atmosphere. Learn something new everyday.

Hmmm, cheddar! My favourite!

— J.W.H.}}

Robert Runté
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T1K 5J5

I was “surprised” to find my inane email comments on Robyn’s photography in the latest **Ozone Hole** (which arrived yesterday). The Star Trek joke thingy was fine to quote, but are you cutting and pasting any old email message into the zine these days? Have you no standards at all?

And for heaven’s sake don’t quote THIS message in your next letter column either.

No, I said stop it! Cut it out.

No wait, when I said cut it out I didn’t mean “cut and paste”.

Stop quoting me.

Stop writing down everything I type.

Stop that...

{{Are you accusing us of resorting to putting any old inane email in our zine? We only put your inane email in our zine. (And by the way, check out www.ozonehole.com/runte/email/inane.)}}

Your points are well taken, as usual. However, I would be remiss if I did not point out that many American companies have operated in Cuba for years with no reprisals from the American government. Coca-Cola has sold its products in Cuba for the last thirty-five years. What gives? Hypocrisy? I’ll leave it open.

And thanks for the cheese!

— J.W.H.}}

Lloyd Penny
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Dear Jahn and Korl:

I guess it went through hell to get to me, but I finally have issue 15 of **Under The Ozone Hole**, and I’ll quickly put a letter of comment together.

My favorite Treks? “*The Trouble With Tribbles*” (original Trek) “*The Measure of a Man*” and “*Time’s Arrow*” (TNG), “*Trials and Tribble-ations*” (DS9), just off the top of my thinning hair. I’ve actually stopped watching DS9 and Voyager... they’re just too dull, and there’s not enough time to sit and watch.

The Aurora final ballot is out for 1997... congrats on another nomination. Both Yvonne and I were nominated again, and finally, we’re not competing against each other. I’m nominated for Fan Achievement (Other) for my fan writing, and Yvonne for Fan Achievement (Organizational) for her work on a one day con last October. We’re hoping...Yvonne’s never won, and if there’s anyone who deserves it, and has never one, it’s her.

Ad Astra 17 took place this past weekend...a

ton of fun. Attendance went over 600 (not sure how much past, final word yet to come from reg.), lots of good comments about improvements in art show, programming and special events, good dance lots of feelgood about this con. Good media coverage, good hotel, and good overall...but then, I’m biased. **Ad Astra 18** will be in a new hotel up the Don Valley Parkway, so it’ll be easier to get to.

My letter...I’m not in Robert Sawyer’s *Frameshift*, but in *Illegal Alien*, due in December. In a few days, it’ll be a full year living at the new address, and I have read and enjoyed Cliff Stoll’s book *The Cuckoo’s Egg*. Some years ago at **Contradiction**, Buffalo/Niagara Falls’ annual con, Stoll was a guest, and after his comments against the internet, someone had the nerve to call this computer programmer/astronomer a Luddite.

The biggest project going...we’ve helped to launch a Worldcon bid for Toronto in 2003. A flyer is enclosed. Take care, see you next issue.

{{I found that the secret to perfect Rice Krispie squares is to only use four cups of Krispies instead of the recommended five. Trust me on this, okay?}}

Thanks for the cheese.

— J.W.H.}}

*{{The term Luddite gets over used (I don’t use it myself). When Ludd started smashing mechanical looms it was out of fear of being out of work (and I understand Ludd was rather simple minded and had no great ideas of social reform, he just wanted to keep working, and eating). E. B. Klassen once wrote some interesting comments on Ludd in response to an article by John Perry Barlow in **Wired** called “Who Blames His Tools”. (Paraphrase alert.) Bernie’s point was that the “Luddites” weren’t so much against new technology, as they were against the lack of concern for people put out of work by new technology. The Luddite movement got some social reforms put in and thus had a positive benefit for us all.}}*

I quit watching DS9 and Voyager as well. I confess that part of the reason is likely that Babylon 5 is on and it’s difficult to go from interesting stories back to the “Captain, something broke and we have to fix it” mainstays of the latest stuff with the Trek label.

The transistor was indeed invented in 1948. I don’t know why L. R. Haswith would have said otherwise. Perhaps he’s jealous of your nomination.

Best of luck on the 2003 Worldcon bid.

Thanks for the cheese.

— K.J.}}

{{E.B. Klassen comments on Karl’s comments in reference to Lloyd’s LoC on E.B.Klassen’s article:}}

Hey Karl;

That’s about right. Ludd’s first name was Ned. The Luddites actually won; they slowed the pace of technological change for one generation of workers, allowing needed social change to occur before the change wrought by technology was complete. It was an incomplete victory to be sure, but they were not the idiots, fools, and incompetents they are currently portrayed as being. In France during the same period the workers tossed their wooden shoes into the machines (the shoes were called sabots, and gave rise to the modern “saboteur”). Here too needed time for social change was forced on the owners of capital. The equivalent today would be bank tellers forcing a twenty-year phased introduction of automatic teller machines; allowing older workers to retire with dignity and younger workers to be retrained. There would still be dislocation, but the dislocation would be far more manageable.

The major problem currently is that there is such rapid change in so many areas — all mostly caused by computerization. Every union, guild, alliance and social group would have to act as the Luddites and Saboteurs did in order to effect a slowdown in the introduction of new technology. It’s not that change can’t be managed and must “just occur”, it’s that the bosses and owners of capital insist upon the change now, driven by the need for quarterly improvements to the bottom line. Technological change is driven by money, not technology. And technology doesn’t make the change inevitable, just possible. It’s the owners of capital that make technological change the imperative it seems to be. And the working classes, particularly in North America, are so thoroughly cowed and stupified that they believe that their inability to adapt overnight is their own fault. Patently absurd, of course, but without sufficient education in the liberal arts and a willingness by the masses to apply their hard-earned knowledge, no change is possible. This is where a failing of democracy looks a lot like the failings of fascism and national socialism, or bolshevikism; critical thought is abandoned, and self-responsibility is turned over to the paternalist state.

— E.B.Klassen}}

{{Karl comments on E.B.Klassen’s comments on Karl’s comments in reference to Lloyd’s LoC on E.B.Klassen’s article:}}

For me it was soon after the Apollo landings that I stopped drinking Tang.

Thanks for the cheese.

— K.J.}}

Cath Jackel
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I went to see a \$2-showing of The Fifth Element last night, and quite enjoyed it, although afterwards I had no trouble finding both feminist

and common-sense quibbles. In the latter category, why do they bother putting all the passengers on the luxury liner to sleep when, as we see from the return trip, it takes less than 1-1/2 hours? Roy and I both played Karl's "find a plausible explanation for the show's flaws" game. He hypothesizes that by putting everyone to sleep the ship's oxygen requirements are lessened. I figure the crew don't want to deal with a bunch of spoiled, fractious, and especially, bored rich people, so they give them sleepy gas to keep them quiet.

Gary Oldman obviously has lots of fun playing an unrepentant villain. Redeeming soft spots? Not here, thank you. Before the movie there was a trailer for *Air Force One*, starring Harrison Ford as the US president. The terrorist villain is played by - you guessed it - Gary Oldman, who obviously will never have trouble finding work.

This is the second action movie in a year to feature a tough, plane-flying US prez as a hero (remember *ID4* last summer). What I want to know is, will the trend continue? Are Americans so disillusioned with their real-life Presidents that they will troup into movie theatres to see a

fictional one blow up bad guys? What do you think the result will be? Will the masses keep on electing dubious leaders in real life but not mind because they can see a *proper* president any time they choose to rent a movie? Will they elect Harrison Ford 8 years down the road? (I have the oddest sense of *deja vu* when I consider that possibility...) Comments, please.

Thanks to my scamming a free pass through the bookstore, Roy and I went to the premiere of *Men in Black*. Fortunately, the movie didn't take itself too seriously, and I found it quite amusing. IMHO, Tommy Lee Jones is way funnier than Will Smith. And there are some lovely throw-away jokes. Dennis Rodman is an alien living on earth, which explains a lot. Although as one of the characters points out, it's not much of a disguise.

Congrats on yet another *UTOH* Aurora nomination! You guys will be distributing ballots with the next issue, right?

*{{For the best line about an actor becoming President, we have but to turn to another genre film, *Back to the Future*. Doc Brown, upon learning that Ronald Reagan will one day be*

President and witnessing the marvels of a camcorder, comments, "This is why your president is an actor - he has to look good on tv!"

And who will Harrison Ford's running mate be? John Rhys-Davies? Mark Hamill? Carrie Fisher? No, wait! Sean Connery. I'd vote for that ticket.

Personally, I think the Canucks should take the \$18,000,000 they're throwing at Messier, and try and land Sakic instead. Now I'd be quite happy to have Messier, but Sakic's at his prime and Mess's best years are well behind him. Sure, it'll cost the Canucks some draft picks, but it'll be darn well worth it.

*Whoa! Mozza! Thanks, eh!
— J.W.H.}}*

We also heard from: Charlotte Nickerson (who sent us our second fax ever—golly, is there no end to this technological revolution?), John Mansfield, Paula Johanson and Michelle Wilson.)

World Peace in Four Easy Steps

An Immodest Proposal by John W. Herbert

Despite the end of the Cold War, the world is still a dangerous place. Many nations continue to fight each other, and we are very lucky that in recent years the major powers have not been drawn into a conflict. It may interest you to know that the third largest nuclear power in the world is Kazakhstan. This is not a thought that fills my dreams at night with confidence and security. (For those of you unsure just where Kazakhstan is, it borders Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Feel better now?) So I suggest that we redouble our efforts to end conflict and bring peace to the planet. I present the following suggestions:

— During times of aggression between two or more countries, the United Nations should be granted special powers to intervene. The U.N. hasn't had much success with military interventions in recent years, so I suggest instead that they order out pizza for all combatants. Nothing causes young men's minds to forget what they were doing faster than a fresh, piping hot pizza. (Okay, there is one *other* thing, but that's too tawdry. Even for the U.N.) Pizza would be a quick, painless method to stop a battle (and cheap if you order from a 2-for-1 place).

— Communication between societies must be improved. There are thousands of languages, dialects and sub-tongues in the world, and yet laughter is a universal expression that everyone understands. Therefore, I suggest the U.N. take over all military and communication satellites and instead of using them to spy on the world's population and send secret messages back and forth, it should use them to broadcast a world-wide Mr. Bean Marathon.

— We must build more McDonalds restaurants. McDonalds has restaurants in (at this writing) 101 countries in the world. Amazingly, no country with a McDonalds has ever invaded any other country with a McDonalds. (Some of you may be thinking that the U.S. invasion of Grenada is an exception, but it's really just a question of semantics; in some cases involving the Super-powers, "invasion" is pronounced "liberation.") We must make sure that a McDonalds is built in every country in the world immediately. We could even make having a McDonalds a condition of entry into the United Nations. Admittedly, this proposal will have devastating environmental and social impact. But hey, that's progress, right?

— Young people, particularly young men, have a lot of excess energy, pent-up frustrations and an overabundance of testosterone. In many cases, these factors influence young people in their decision to enlist in the military. We need a "military substitute" where these young people can safely vent their rage and hostility. This is why Canadians invented hockey. (You'll note that since the formation of the National Hockey League, Canada has never started a war.)

Let's sum up these proposals: pizza, Mr. Bean, McDonalds, and hockey. Let's break the proposals down even further into their basic elements: make sure that everyone has enough food to eat and foster a sense of well being.

Jeez, it can't be *that* simple, can it?

REVIEWS

Star Wars - The Special Edition

written and directed by George Lucas

The recent retooling of Star Wars raises some interesting questions of art. When is art no longer the property of the artist and when does it become the property of the public?

Director George Lucas has added some new scenes and restored some lost scenes to the 20th Anniversary edition of Star Wars. Lucas has also replaced some of the clunky motion-control model spaceship shots with brand new CGI shots, which only point out even more how clunky those old models shots have become. State of the art once, but obsolete now. Why didn't he just replace all of them? But I digress.

What if twenty years after the fact, da Vinci announced that he'd really wanted the Mona Lisa to be in a hot pink dress, but he just didn't have the proper shade of pink at the time. Is it his prerogative to make that change? Would Shakespeare, if he were alive, have the right to go back and tinker with the ending of *Romeo and Juliet* so he could set it up for a sequel?

If Lucas' alterations were simply enhancing old effects shots that don't alter the story, that's one thing. But Lucas also has made a change that panders to political correctness, and changes a characterization: Greedo shoots first.

Greedo is the green alien who confronts Han Solo about a debt at a table in the bar at Mos Eisley. In the original version, Greedo is blown away by Solo, but in the new version Greedo shoots first and Han shoots back in self-defense. The issues raised by this are threefold: first, it makes Greedo look like an idiot because he can't hit a large target at a distance of about two feet (admittedly, we don't know a lot about Greedo – he could very well be an idiot); second, this change smacks of political correctness – we can't have a hero that would shoot first and kill someone; and thirdly, the character of Han Solo has been altered. As played out originally, Han is a selfish rogue who thinks only of himself. This makes his return at the end of the film all the more heroic as he has finally found something more important than himself. But by having Han shoot only after Greedo shoots first in the new version, this outlaw aspect of Han has been softened, thus also softening his change of heart at the end.

Worse yet, Lucas plans for this new version to be the definitive Star Wars. The previous version will no longer be available.

And Lucas is not the only person changing old movies to be politically correct. In the recent reissue of E.T., director Steven Spielberg excised a line wherein one of the children says he wants to dress up as a terrorist for Halloween. Spielberg

has also said that he would make other changes if he were making the film now, such as removing a scene where FBI agents are chasing a group of children with their guns drawn. I'm glad to see that Spielberg has grown up and realized that guns are not something to play around with, but obviously that was something he had not considered in 1982. But so what? Art reflects its times, and its creators. If Lucas and Spielberg feel grown-up now, that's great. But is it right for them, or anyone, to go back to inflict their modern maturity on their youthful exuberance? I mean, don't you think that fifty-something Pete Townshend would like to go back and rewrite "*My Generation*": "Hope I die before I get old."

The special edition of Star Wars sets a dangerous precedent. Will other artists now revisit and retune their past works? What if Mel Brooks decides to redub Blazing Saddles in an effort to make it politically correct? Can you imagine the result? "The sheriff is an African-American!" Sure it's more polite, but is it funny? I hereby reserve my right to be offended.

(The Special Edition of The Empire Strikes Back contains few changes other than some special effect shots, although there is a new scene with Darth Vader inserted near the end that is not voiced by James Earl Jones(!). The Special Edition of Return of the Jedi also has mostly just special effects changes, and a second and longer song inserted in the scene in Jabba's palace (like we needed that). Verdict: Empire still rocks and Jedi still sucks.)

— J.W.H.

Tippi Agogo

Well, we're just back from the Edmonton Fringe Festival - one of the more effective money filters we walk through in the summer. The Edmonton Fringe is huge - a day with less than twenty thousand people is a slow one. But after seeing the Arrogant Worms play a street gig, there wasn't a whole lot else we wanted to see (at least not with the kids in tow). We wandered through the streets of people sampling all the different foods and chatting to whomever we happened upon. The last couple of days have been cold and rainy, and while we were watching a clown duo, a cold threatening wind blew up. The duo turned the tip early as everyone was starting to leave anyway. We joined the exodus and headed towards the truck. But as we rounded a corner we heard a sound. A strange polyrhythmic noise sculpture. A noise that proved that there is a god, and his name is Tippi Agogo.

The last time I saw Tippi was in Victoria

at the Fringe. He was performing in Market Square and having a wonderful time. I had first heard him about three weeks earlier at the Edmonton Fringe and bought both his tapes and the T-shirt. He remembered me and we talked about not much in particular. Since then we've listened to his last two Morningside interviews and heard about his trip to Europe. But for the last year or two I'd lost track of him.

Tippi comes from the future; in particular, the future of *Neuromancer*. Street musicians from Bill Gibson's future are all modeled on Tippi. He uses garbage to create the wildest sounds I have ever heard. Tonight it was two shampoo bottles on sticks, a drum made from a cardboard barrel, a pan pipe made from drinking straws, a squeaker from a kid's toy, and miscellaneous other stuff. There was also a small amp and a couple of mikes and a digital delay.

Tippi creates rhythms, loops them with the digital delay, and stacks other rhythms on top, then plays more rhythms overtop of the result. Banging the shampoo bottles on coffee cans creates some of the rhythms, some are created simply with his voice. The result sounds anarchic and wild, but he maintains a consummate control over them. The madness is eminently danceable.

The recordings I have (including the two new CDs) don't have quite the wild abandon that explodes from the live performance. Live, Tippi is a major hit at the Fringe, the Street Performers Festival, and the Children's Festival. His mother is apparently a professor of musicology at the University of Alberta, and Tippi has formal training in his background. But training does not define his music, it supports it. Tippi draws freely from Eno's ideas of ambient music, African tribal music, and the pop music of the last thirty years. But these are only influences.

Musically, Tippi Agogo remains resolutely himself.

— E.B.Klassen

Batman and Robin

written by Akiva Goldsmith
directed by Joel Schumacher

Let's start with the good parts.

The costumes look great. For Batman and Robin, they've deliberately highlighted the fetish aspect of superhero myth. Four stars out of the big five—Batman (George Clooney), Batgirl (Alicia Silverstone), Robin (Chris O'Donnell) and Mr. Freeze (Arnold Schwarzenegger)—look like they just walked off the pages of *Boudoir Noir*. Even the mask of a minor villain, Bane, gleefully copies the gimp from Pulp Fiction.

Uma Thurman, arguably the only genuine actor in the main line-up, is also the only person who looks like she's having fun. A couple of her scenes actually work as high camp—like her big entrance as Poison Ivy, where she walks across a dance floor on the oiled backs of prostrate bodybuilding beefcake. Similarly, Michael Gough who plays Alfred is the only one who retains any semblance of dignity.

A couple of the set pieces look pretty neat, as do a few of the outdoor shots of Gotham City. Um... the opening credits are pretty impressive. Is that it?

Think so. The rest is horrible.

First the plot. Dr. Fries was your normal cryogenics research scientist when his wife came down with a (fictional) disease called MacGregor's Syndrome. (Through an astounding coincidence, this is the same disease Batman's butler Alfred suffers from throughout the film.) Fries froze his wife to buy time for a cure, but fell into a vat containing a mysterious liquid nitrogen compound. The resulting Mr. Freeze (a) requires sub-zero temperatures to survive, (b) has supposedly lost all empathy for mankind and (c) spends his time spouting lines like "Your compassion is your weakness, Batman—with my cold heart I cannot help but triumph."

Meanwhile, back in the jungle, Dr. Woodrue tries to kill his research assistant, plant-lover Pamela Isley. Unfortunately for him, she falls into a table-full of chemicals meant to create animal-plant hybrids. The resulting Poison Ivy (a) has phenomenal pheromones that can kill with a kiss, (b) has a pathological hatred of all animals and (c) spends her time spouting lines like "Ah, Batman and Robin, the militant arm of our mammalian oppressors."

In case you hadn't guessed, the script is a major honker. The stilted dialogue consists almost solely of hoary clichés, patched together with lame one-liners that I assume were supposed to be funny. It doesn't help that everyone (with the exception of Thurman and the guy who plays Alfred) delivers their lines with such stiffness you know they're just itching for the scene to be over so they can get out of that damned suit.

Direction is sloppy. The action sequences are clumsy, illogical and just plain stupid. Even the stunts are terrible—you can practically see the wires "assisting" the stuntmen when they leap across the room. Then there's the scenes that are just plain silly, like when Robin leaps onto Freeze's rocket (riding it into the stratosphere from the outside) and later surfs—yes, surfs—his way down to the ground. Physics lesson for the scriptwriters: a human body falling from the upper atmosphere will always go splat, even if it is riding a surfboard.

While some of the sets are cool, most are not. Apart from a few scenes, Gotham looks like exactly what it is: a bunch of sets constructed so they can be easily destroyed. The special effects

are equally bad.

But the movie's biggest flaw is that it takes after the Adam West/Burt Ward TV show. There's no echo of the darkness of Frank Miller, or the twistedness of Tim Burton. Schwarzenegger even wears the same bathrobe outfit worn by the TV Mr. Freeze, who wasn't played by Liberace, but does look very, very much like him.

I haven't even mentioned the Virtual Alfred in the Batcave computer, Batman and Robin's stupid Freudian father-son jealousy conflict over Poison Ivy, Elle MacPherson's gratuitous appearance as Bruce Wayne's "Let's get married" girlfriend. Dumb, dumb, dumb. Pointless, too.

For comic book fans who were excited by the appearance of Bane on the movie posters: it's only Bane by name. In the comics, Bane was a brilliant criminal mastermind who was the only villain to actually defeat Bruce Wayne. In the movie, he's a dumb, hulking brute whose most intelligent line of dialogue the movie is "Boooooommmbbb..."

Ultimately, we have a blatantly fake plot where fake-looking characters acting in fake-looking locales, fighting fake-looking fights surrounded by fake-looking special effects and speaking fake-sounding dialogue while Alfred suffers from a fake disease. How are we supposed to care what happens?

— Roy Fisher

Elf Fantastic

edited by Martin H. Greenberg
DAW Books; ISBN 0-88677-736-4; 318 pp.; \$6.99

Elves are all alike, aren't they? Not the elves and fantasies in *Elf Fantastic*.

The latest in the series of anthologies edited by Martin H. Greenberg is an eclectic assortment of stories on elves. From Andre Norton to Diana Paxson, these twenty writers present their personal angles on elves and that lively area where the mundane world interacts with the land of Faerie.

Barbara Delaplace's displaced elf in the Florida Keys watches the fading glow of a portal back to his own world—but prefers to stay and order another beer with his human friends. C.J. Henderson's man who sees the leprechauns has a story to tell about their gold that is not for the greedy or faint of heart. And Tanya Huff's "A *Midsummer Night's Dream Team*" kicks butt on the basketball court at the Olympics.

Wistful, eerie or good-humored; the story that hits all those notes is Lynn Abbey's "Jerlayne", a solid anchor for this motley collection. Of all the stories, this one describes best the strange connections between fairie races and mortals. The old tales are not forgotten, but new changes on them are rung here.

— Paula Johanson

Galaxy Quest

story by David Howard and Robert Gordon
screenplay by Robert Gordon
directed by Dean Parisot

In a plotline similar to *Diplomatic Act* (reviewed above), Tim Allen plays an actor who was the star of a popular science fiction tv show called Galaxy Quest that was cancelled in the early 1980s, playing the venerable Commander Peter Quincy Taggart of the NSEA *Protector*. Now the only gigs he and his fellow castmates (Sigourney Weaver, Alan Rickman, Tony Shaloub) can get is on the sf convention circuit where they encounter hordes of fans who really need to get a life. But a group of real aliens has been monitoring the adventures of Allen and company and believe the actors to be real space adventurers and kidnap them to help them in their quest to defeat an evil intergalactic overlord (what else?).

While no great piece of classic cinema, Galaxy Quest at least delivers laughs on a regular basis. And the strong cast is able to dig deep for the laughs when they are hard to find, and even manage to be a little touching on occasion as the actors all realize that they have to believe in themselves in order to save themselves. And few cheap sf clichés are missed as Allen plays the Shatner-like actor playing the Kirkian Captain. Very amusing is the running gag of Guy (Sam Rockwell), the actor who played Crewman Number Six in episode thirty-one, killed by a lava monster before the first commercial break. Guy, accidentally taken away with the main actors, is worried that since he is the expendable crewman, he'll be the one who dies. And it doesn't help matters that none of the regular cast can remember Guy's last name.

(When the actors have to go down to a planet, he goes with them but starts freaking out: "First I thought I was the crewman who stays on the ship but something is up there and it kills me. But now I'm thinking I'm the crewman who gets killed five minutes after we land on the planet!! [One of his fellow actors slaps him to calm him down.] See? I'm the hysterical guy who needs to be slapped, and then I die.")

"Maybe you're the plucky comedy relief, Guy. Ever think of that?"

"Plucky...?")

This is not going to win any Oscars. But it is an amusing way to spend a couple of hours.

— J.W.H.

The Golden Globe

by John Varley
Ace Books; September 1999; ISBN 0-441-00643-4; 517 pp.; \$8.99

Although one must hesitate when one sees a cover blurb by that reknowned master of literature Tom Clancy praising anyone as "the best writer in America," in this case Tom is right on the money. Nobody does it better than John Varley.

Varley's latest, *The Golden Globe*, is a tour across the solar system of Varley's "Eight Worlds" universe (from *Steel Beach* and *The Ophiuchi Hotline*) and a tour through the mind of Sparky Valentine, one-time child star, now little-known actor, small-time con man, and barely one step of the law and/or the bad guys. At times funny, fast-paced, moving and always entertaining, *The Golden Globe* is a must read and Varley at his best. And that says a lot, because Varley at his worst is still better than most.

Okay, here's the plan: we all get together and convince Ace Books that they pay John Varley too much money and that they should pay him less per book. This way, he'll have to publish a novel more often than once every six years. Whatta ya think? Will it work?

— J.W.H.

Heisenberg Probably Slept Here: The Lives, Times and Ideas of the Great Physicists of the 20th Century

by Richard P. Brennan

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.; ISBN 0-471-15709-0; 274 pp. \$32.50 CDN

There isn't a country & western song that warbles, "Mommas, don't let your babies grow up to be physicists." And after this book, there probably never will be.

With a light enough tone to make the title appropriate, *Heisenberg Probably Slept Here* races through eight quick profiles of great modern physicists. If you had to write a short paper on Newton, Einstein, Planck, Rutherford, Bohr, Heisenberg, Feynman or Gell-Mann, you could probably do it after reading one chapter. But if you wondered "who is Gell-Mann?" or why Louis de Broglie isn't on the table of contents, you'll enjoy the cross-references as some of the other great men of science are described as they interact with these giants.

The expression "men of science" is, alas, appropriate for this book. The only woman of science named is Marie Skłodowska Curie. All other women mentioned are mothers, wives, sisters and cousins of the scientists, and usually given full credit as their caregivers. Brennan makes it easy to believe that the myth of the absent-minded physicist leaving his pants behind was first told by the women who kept house for physicists. Some of these women relatives were educated scholars in the shadows of giants. Not all of them were happy to come second to physics in their man's affections.

In one anecdote, Richard Feynman's second wife tells him as they sit down to dinner: "I forgot to tell you, but you had a telephone call this afternoon. Some old bore is in town and wanted you to join him for dinner.' The 'old bore' she referred to was Niels Bohr, who was visiting, and Feynman missed a chance to talk to him, which he was not at all happy about... The marriage was clearly not working."

The author would have done well to credit his own *soror mystica*, Carolyn F. Brennan, on the cover of the book for her excellent illustrations and critical review.

With an introduction that gives a short background in the history of physics, and a chronology, glossary, bibliography and index, this is a very practical and enjoyable text. Keep it on the coffee table to impress your friends. You can always hope that the kids will read it and grow up to be physicists.

— Paula Johanson

Hercules

written by Ron Clements, Barry Johnson, Don McEnery, Irene Mecchi, John Musker and Bob Shaw

directed by Ron Clements, Michael Lange and John Musker

Here's the skinny: if you go into Disney's Hercules expecting a cartoon parody, you'll enjoy it immensely. If you go into the theatre expecting a faithful adaptation of Greek myths—well, this is Disney after all. Unlike the execrable Pocahontas or the Hunchback of Notre Dame (the latter of which I refused to see on principle), at least there are lots of different versions of Hercules that survived from ancient Greece—so at least there's precedent for changing the story.

And change it they did. Hercules doesn't kill his wife and children in this one. Since good guys can't cheat on their wives in a Disney flick, this Hercules is the son of Zeus and Hera, turned mortal by a magic potion from Hades, Lord of the Underworld. There's also only five Muses in this version, not nine (I must ask Karl whether working for Disney makes you forget basic math). And the Herculean labor of deflowering 50 virgins in one night is, uh, overlooked. Actually, the whole legend of the 12 Labors of Hercules is pretty much ignored.

Enough kvetching. Hercules is just plain fun. It hearkens back to Disney's success with Aladdin, where the artists and writers just plain went nuts.

It's an uncomplicated plot. Hercules is born to Zeus and Hera. The three Fates tell Hades that in 18 years, when planetary alignments free the elemental Titans from their prison, Hades will conquer Mount Olympus—but only if Hercules is taken out of the picture. A botched hit on baby Herc leaves the boy mortal but with godly strength. Two simple farmers adopt the baby Kal-El—uh, Hercules—who grows up a misfit. Upon maturity, Herc seeks out Philoctites, the hero-training satyr (voiced by Danny DeVito), in an effort to find out where he belongs.

As Herc gets more and more famous, Hades does his best to thwart Herc's rising heroism, eventually sending an ancient Greek femme fatale, Megara, to seduce him and find his weakness. Megara sold her soul to Hades to save the man she'd fallen in love with—a man who later

spurned her for a younger woman. For Disney, this is a subtle touch.

Along the way there's lots of anachronistic references, lots of celebrity voice cameos (listen for Paul Schaffer as Hermes) and lots of self-referential nudges at the whole Disney merchandising cult-of-cartoon-personality phenomenon.

The voices are perfectly cast, especially Danny DeVito as Philoctites the hero trainer and the standout, James Woods as Hades. His silky, menacing rasp really makes you believe ancient Greek gods could have American accents.

Fact is, in this movie most of the Disneyfication actually works. Whenever the story slows down, the Muses do a Motown number to fill in the blanks. The deco style of animation mimics art found on ancient Greek artifacts.

Which isn't to say the movie's actually ART. It works because its creators didn't even try to follow the plot. Again, go to the theatre expecting a cartoon—don't go expecting real Greek mythology. You also KNOW there's going to be a Hercules TV cartoon series (à la Aladdin) coming up in a year or so.

The standout scene: The hydra battle. It's a cartoon monster that's genuinely scary.

— Roy Fisher

The Horned Dinosaurs

by Peter Dodson

Princeton University Press; ISBN 0-691-02882-6; 346 pp.

Dinosaur lovers go far beyond collecting little plastic toys. The best-selling dinosaur toys (or scale models for real fans) are the Triceratops: the dinosaur that looks like a rhinoceros with three horns and a frill on the back of its head. Now there is a popular science book that tells every detail of the Triceratops and its relatives.

The Horned Dinosaurs belongs on your shelf next to *The Complete T. Rex*. Peter Dodson uses his expert knowledge of geology and anatomy to discuss the long-dead bones of Triceratops and its relatives. The illustrations he has chosen are very easy to understand, and Dodson describes them in plain language. But his long description of minute differences among species is not riveting. Many readers will scan ahead for "the good stuff."

Ever wonder if dinosaurs plodded along or bounded like deer? Or if a Triceratops could win a fight with a Tyrannosaurus Rex? And why did the dinosaurs die out, anyway? Dodson discusses many ideas in a clear and readable way. With 63 pages of footnotes, references and a complete index, this is a good reference book for schools and home study for the dinosaur lover.

— Paula Johanson

A Mood Apart: Depression, Mania and other Afflictions of the Self

by Peter C. Whybrow, M.D.

Basic Books, HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.; ISBN 0-465-04725-4; 363 pp. \$34 CDN

If you're looking for the one true book with all the answers about mood disorders, you won't find it anywhere. But if you want to read a discussion of depressive or manic-depressive syndrome, one that describes feelings as well as symptoms, and medication as well as self-analysis, this new book is a good place to start.

Peter Whybrow describes depressions and mania in plain language. He writes in a straitforward way that makes illness as familiar as grief and joy. There are no magic answers in this book, but there are a lot of questions and a lot of searching for the right kinds of answers. Among other things, Whybrow suggests that "it is repeated stress or chronic stress, where control over the situation has been lost or given up ... that seems to be particularly malignant in the kindling of bipolar illness."

Whybrow quotes his sources and his subjects extensively in their own words. *A Mood Apart* is not a Pop Science book. It would be well recommended to someone who wanted to learn more about the experience and treatment of depression, and manic-depression.

— Paula Johanson

October Sky

by Homer H. Hickam, Jr.

Dell; February, 1999; ISBN 0-440-23550-2; 428 pp.; \$9.99 (published in hardcover as *Rocket Boys*)

October Sky

screenplay by Lewis Colick

directed by Joe Johnston

There's only one way to say it: *October Sky*, a true story, is one of the best books I've read in a long, long time.

In 1957, growing up in the slowly dying mining town of Coalwood, West Virginia wasn't easy for many young boys, including Homer Hickam. His brother was a high school football star, his father was the mine's superintendent, and he was an introspective bookworm. And in a town that swallowed its men alive, Homer had no future to look forward to, save the mines. But one night, for the very first time something man-made streaked across the October sky and Homer found a dream that could take him away from Coalwood and the mines. Together with other misfits, he started turning scraps of metal into rockets with the dream of someday working with Wernher von Braun.

But this is more than a story of teenage nerds with a dream, it's the story of an estranged son and father trying to find some middle ground; it's the story, the all-too-tragic story, of the decay and death of a company town where workers and families are used and spit out and abandoned when the coal finally gives out; and it's the

story of persuading your passion, and the luck of having the right person in the right place who can give you the push you need.

Wonderfully written, evocative, eloquent and heart-warming, Hickam's story is touching and moving. Read this book!

Or see the movie! Joe Johnston's adaptation of the novel is just as stirring and moving. If the film has any flaws, they concern nothing more than minor editing issues as some small plot threads are left dangling without much explanation. (And the marketing genius who changed the movie's title from the book's original title of *Rocket Boys* should be taken out and beaten. Oh, never mind -- he'd probably like that.)

Watch the book. Read the movie. Or vice versa. Either way, it's a real treat.

— J.W.H.

Project Maldon

by Chris Attack.

Baen, 1997; 375pp.; ISBN 0-671-87786-0

Chris Attack's *Project Maldon*, is a surprisingly good read. Indeed, I was so surprised that I decided to go to the trouble of actually writing a review. I hope to convince you to rush out and buy a copy of this debut novel, in spite of the apparently good reasons not to.

I admit that I had originally bought the book only out of a sense of completion: I try to keep my Canadian SF library up to date. (That, and because Mr. Attack turned out to be standing next to me when I asked the clerk about new Canadian SF, and I was too embarrassed to reject his book with him actually standing there, watching.)

I admit I really wanted to put the book back. The cover art — two poorly drawn stealth bombers apparently attacking a spacestation, complete with fiery explosions — is not what you would call promising. The artwork is also, as it turns out, completely irrelevant: there AREN'T any space battles in the book. (Okay; there is a rather tense board meeting in Earth orbit, but I don't think that counts.) Worse even than the artwork is the typography: "Project Maldon" juts out of the cover like some cheesy movie marquee. Even the author's name works against him, summoning up visions of glorified violence and hackneyed mayhem. This is not, I am sorry to say, a cover that would draw a second glance from even the most fanatical devotee of militaristic space opera.

But never one to judge a book by its cover, I turned to the blurb. Where it appears that *Project Maldon* is yet another redundant entry in the seemingly endless procession of cyberpunk cash-ins: the dystopian future; the god-like AI, the slow slide towards Armageddon. Gibson's once-original vision has been reshaped by so many talentless hacks, that I swear I'll give up SF if I have to read one more of these annoyingly predictable, formulaic, mass market, processed cheese substitutes. Cyberpunk is an idea whose

time has past, okay folks? I mean I teach in a town where half the population still thinks that giving women the vote was a bad idea, and yet even my most isolated rural students routinely debate the finer details of artificial intelligence on their web pages. I'm telling you, this isn't SF any longer, it now belongs to the genre of "bad mainstream bestsellers". I fully expect the next cyberpunk offering to be by Danielle Steele.

Front cover art and back cover blurb notwithstanding, however, this first novel is well worth your attention. Attack's strong narrative skills and engaging style elevate *Project Maldon* above the run of the cyber-mill, and the familiarity of the Canadian locales and future history added to my enjoyment. (That the story is told from the perspective of a dashing sociologist didn't exactly hurt either. I haven't enjoyed a sociologist as protagonist this much since Chad C. Mulligan in Brunner's *Stand on Zanzibar*.) Drawn into the action, I found myself reluctant to put the book down again, even though much of it is Canadianly-depressing.

Attack is clearly carrying on a long tradition of Canadian SF. There is no happy ending, for example, no American-style saved-by-the-cavalry rescue. Almost everybody we care about gets killed, the good guys lose, and our protagonists fails to achieve his major goals. In the end, this turns out not to matter terribly, because most of the battles he has been fighting were the wrong ones anyway. The ending is typically Canadian in its ambiguity: our side didn't win, but neither did the bad guys. Are things better or worse than when the book started? We can't tell, and won't know until history passes judgment years later, though it is already clear that almost no one got what they thought they wanted.

Attack's future is depressingly familiar and believable, though the strong narrative carries us past the bleak cityscapes at a sufficiently page-turning pace that you'll be hooked anyway. Unlike many books set in the near future, Attack resists the temptation of spelling out the details of that future history. None of Attack's characters can really understand how the country came to be in such a terrible mess, which is both more believable and more emotionally satisfying for the reader than any pat explanation would be. As a sociologist, I almost always find authors' predictions to be annoyingly naive, but Attack simply avoids the whole issue by sticking to nicely vague allusions, and the occasional clichéd encyclopedia entry.

I also really appreciated that Attack left much of the old world quietly in place, untouched by the developments around them. The protagonist's office is next door to a soap factory, for example, which continues to pump out detergent pretty much as it always has, even while everything else around it is going to hell.

There are a lot of such nice touches in this book. Although admittedly a novel in the

cyberpunk tradition, it is sufficiently original to warrant attention, particularly given that it is Atack's first time out. *Project Maldon* is easily comparable to Robert Sawyer's first novel, *Golden Fleece*, and might even be the best first since Sean Stewart's *Passion Play*. Atack is, therefore, clearly worth watching.

—Robert Runté

Starfish

by Peter Watts

Tor Books; February 2000; ISBN 0-812-57585-7; 374 pp.; \$8.99

I'm going to go out on a big limb here and predict that *Starfish* is going to win the Aurora this year. If it doesn't, I'll demand a recount.

An ambitious and impressive first novel, it concerns the genetically and mechanically altered humans who man underwater geo-thermal power stations along the Juan de Fuca ridge just off the BC coast. It is not a place for any sane person, and the only people who can tolerate the working conditions are people that the surface society is best rid of anyway.

Watts manages to make you want to keep reading, even though all his characters are thoroughly unlikable. The oppressive atmosphere seeps through the pages as Watts draws you deeper into the underwater intrigue.

This book is going to make a big splash. Catch the wave.

— J.W.H.

Star Trek: Insurrection

written by Rick Berman and Michael Piller

directed by Jonathan Frakes

What a piece of crap.

— J.W.H.

Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace

written and directed by George Lucas
There are some that remember May, 1977 not with giddy nostalgia, but with a sad melancholia. For that month marked the release of the original Star Wars, written and directed by George Lucas, and for some, it marked the death knell of American cinema.

Perhaps that's a bit of an overstatement, but the unexpected and unparalleled success of the film marked a definite change in filmmaking, and ushered in the modern era of films driven by visual effects. Starting with the success of Jaws two summers previously, continued by Star Wars, and reinforced by the success six months later of Close Encounters of the Third Kind, Hollywood turned towards big, loud, whiz bang effects-filled films to keep its coffers filled. Lucas had help redefine filmmaking, and he began looking for the next step in the evolution of the filmmaking process. He believes he's found it, and as he returns as writer and director, The Phantom Menace is his ultimate experiment.

The Phantom Menace is a prequel to the

original trilogy, and here we follow Jedi knights Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) and his mentor Qui-Gon Jinn (Liam Neeson) as they investigate a dispute between the planet Naboo and the Trade Federation. As this dispute sows the seeds of what will become the dreaded Galactic Empire, they encounter a small boy with a dark destiny, Anakin Skywalker (Jake Lloyd). Meanwhile, Senator Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid, one of few actors reprising his role from the original trilogy), is moving behind the scenes to usurp galactic power for himself. And, with the help of a nasty dark lord of the Sith named Darth Maul (Ray Park), moving in the shadows behind them all is the mysterious Darth Sidious (also Ian McDiarmid).

There are many elements from The Phantom Menace that resonate with the original Star Wars. We have the wise, older Jedi (played by an accomplished, "serious" actor) who sacrifices himself to save his young Jedi apprentice (Qui-Gon/Obi-Wan – Obi-Wan/Luke); a dark-robed, mysterious figure working malevolently behind the scenes (Darth Sidious – The Emperor); and a young boy, potentially strong in the ways of The Force™, breaks free from the bonds of the planet Tatooine and slowly discovers his destiny (Anakin Skywalker – Luke Skywalker).

The film opens slowly, bogged down in exposition and drags ponderously in places. There is so little humanity in the film, it's very tough for the humans in the audience to find someone to latch onto and become engaged by the film.

The best thing about the opening of the original Star Wars was the sense that you were just dropped right in the middle of the story. With a few simple lines of dialogue, Lucas quickly established that there was quite a backstory for everyone involved: "There'll be no escape for the princess this time!"; "There will be no one to stop us this time!"; and the clear indications that Leia and Vader obviously have quite a history as antagonists.

Here, the villains have no motivations, at least none that are ever made clear. They are the worst kind of cookie-cutter villain; they are evil simply because they are evil (or maybe it's because they're just assholes). Perhaps all will be revealed in later films, but that is to the detriment of this film. Without any reason for their behaviour, they are behaving like simple evil cartoons (literally *and* figuratively in some cases). Darth Maul never really does anything evil, or never has any motivation to be evil. He just looks cool.

In his introduction to the novelization of Return of the Jedi, Lucas wrote, "Star Wars is also very much concerned with the tensions between humanity and technology ... In Jedi, the theme remains the same, as the simplest of natural forces brings down the seemingly invincible weapons of the Empire." Lucas, it

seems, has failed to learn his own lesson as he seemed more concerned with directing special effects than actors.

There's no question that The Phantom Menace represents a quantum leap in the technology of filmmaking. It pushes the envelope for special effects beyond anything that could have been imagined even five years ago. The processor power is mind-boggling and is increasing exponentially. (At ILM, the Kerner Power Series 4 that rendered the digital effects for The Abyss and Terminator 2 has just been retired. It can no longer keep up with the demands of its current job: handling ILM's email.) Lucas has been researching and testing this technology for years, and now here is its full-fledged roll out.

Titanic featured 500 special effects shots, while The Phantom Menace has more than 2,000 (there are only 2,200 shots in the whole film). Indeed, there is nary a shot or sequence in the film which has not been enhanced by some sort of digital manipulation. Many sets were extended or created entirely with digital animation. Whole battle sequences, with armies of thousands, exist only as data bits in ILM's mainframe.

Lucas's ability to manipulate film now extends to actors themselves. The puppeteer performing C-3PO from behind was digitally removed, while the actor who played Jar Jar Binks was replaced and rotoscoped by a character animated on a computer. Many of the actors' performances were filmed against bluescreen so that the actors could be inserted into digital sets. And Lucas was able to take his lead actors' performances from different takes and put them together. For instance, if he liked Neeson's take four but McGregor's take six of a scene, he could (and did) digitally splice what he liked from separate takes and reassemble them as one scene. He was even able to take an actor's facial expression from one take and superimpose it seamlessly onto the actor's face from a different take.

The screen is so often filled with anatomically improbable (albeit spectacularly designed and realized) animated characters, it's easy to forget that you are watching a movie and start thinking that you're watching a very long Marvin the Martian cartoon. And Marvin would fit in with this bunch quite well – a completely implausible body, a strange dialect and voice and played mostly for comedy relief. But most of these characters exist as one-note characters.

Indeed, some even verge on racism. The aliens leading the trade embargo have Japanese accents. One sometimes gets the feeling that you're watching a bad WWII film about Pearl Harbor and that Toshiro Mifune was hired as the dialogue coach.

And Jar Jar Binks is an abomination. With his pidgin English ("yousa" and "messa" for "you" and "me"), dreadlock-like ears, and bellbottom pants and vest, he is a jive-walking Uncle-Toming token toady, the latest in a long line of cinematic black stereotypes. Joe

Morgenstern, film critic for the **Wall Street Journal**, described Jar Jar as “a Rastafarian Stepin Fetchit on platform hoofs, crossed annoyingly with Butterfly McQueen.” Rick Barrs of the alternative Los Angeles weekly **New Times** wrote, “[We] can only hope that Massa George comes to his senses...and kills off shufflin’ Jar Jar.” Lucas spent a lot of time and effort trying to create fully animated virtual characters, but instead of creating characters, he created caricatures.

As a special effect, at times Jar Jar is moderately effective. Unfortunately, as a central character, he delivers a lot of exposition that at that is nearly undecipherable because of his (seemingly) Jamaican accent. He is often so obviously a special effect that he doesn’t become anything more than a painful distraction.

And many of the special effects do become just distractions. Lucas has fallen into the same trap that *Return of the Jedi* fell into (but avoided by *Star Wars* and *The Empire Strikes Back*): the effects must serve the story, not the other way around. The aforementioned battle sequences do not stir our emotions nor engage us in any way. The battles are between cartoon Gungans and cartoon robot droids, and we don’t care much about either faction. It looks wonderful; it resonates nothing.

And the actors often seem at a loss. Certainly, this is the toughest job for an actor: acting in front of a bluescreen, playing a scene against nothing, and reacting to a character that only exists in the director’s mind and will upstage you when it’s finally inserted into the film. And it seems that most of the time, Lucas simply abandoned his actors. Both Neeson and McGregor have publicly decried their experience making the film. Neeson is sometimes effective, but often seems bored with the whole thing and throws away some of the best lines in the film. McGregor is more effective, but is often given little to do while playing second fiddle to Neeson.

Directing only his fourth movie (and first since the original *Star Wars* 22 years ago), Lucas’s direction is uneven and choppy. And let’s face it – Lucas was never a gifted director in the first place. [THX-1138](#) and [American Graffiti](#) were good films, but the direction was nothing special, and *Star Wars* succeeded in spite of Lucas’s sometimes pedestrian direction. Lucas has often said that he didn’t always know what he was doing when he made *Star Wars* and that he filmed it by the seat of his pants, whereas [The Phantom Menace](#) represents the zenith of filmmaking. I wish Lucas would go back to those days when he didn’t know what he was doing. Maybe then we would have had a good film.

The humour is forced, childish and unfunny. Fart jokes, do-do jokes, kicked in the groin jokes, slapstick during the climactic battle sequence. Memo to George; these aren’t funny! And Lucas’s sudden spin that these are children’s

films doesn’t wash. *Star Wars* is not a children’s film – billions of people die. And *Empire* is most definitely not a kiddie’s film. This is a series of films with the repeated image of people getting their limbs and body parts hacked off, not exactly family viewing. And the prequel trilogy is dealing with heavy, dark themes -- we will eventually see the destruction of the Jedi knights, and the brutal rise to power of Palpatine and the Empire. One way of looking at the first trilogy is that this is a series of films about Hitler’s childhood and his eventual rise to power through murder and mayhem.

Jake Lloyd, the child actor portraying young Anakin is mostly ineffectual in the central role. Not all of the fault can be put at his feet. Lucas has given him stale, cliché-riddled dialogue that no actor could deliver and no child would ever say. And all the characters are saddled with hokey, hoary dialogue that, well frankly, just sucks. (Harrison Ford is reported to have once remarked, “[George] can type it, but we can’t say it.”)

The problem with Anakin as a character is we never understand what Qui-Gon sees in the boy. Qui-Gon believes young Skywalker is strong in the ways of The Force™, but no one else can see this, not Obi-Wan, not Yoda, not the Jedi council and, most especially, not the audience. (And why didn’t Anakin use The Force™ to assist himself during the race? This movie hinges on the fact that Anakin is supposed to be strong in the ways of The Force™, yet we never see this and a golden chance for a demonstration of power during the pod race is missed.) And Lucas never uses his large, six-movie canvas to any advantage by hinting or foreshadowing Anakin’s future (or Senator Palpatine’s dark destiny as the Emperor for that matter). A hint of the future, even a subtle one, and of the darkness to come would have helped this film immensely.

And Lucas has inserted concepts which undermine the strengths (and plot points) of the entire series.

Now a person’s ability to use The Force™ depends in part of some strange particles (midichlorians) in your blood, not on your inner strength of character and resolve.

Apparently, Anakin is “the chosen one who will bring balance to The Force.™” Huh? Most of the Jedi in this film speak pseudo-New Age gibberish. Pity poor Sam Jackson spewing this nonsense in his cameo -- it’s a big fall from [Pulp Fiction](#).

According to Yoda, Anakin is too old to be taught the ways of The Force™. Hmmm, so if Anakin at ten is too old, I guess Obi-Wan was really going overboard when he decided to teach 20-something Luke.

There is a delegation of ETs in the Senate. Yes, *those* ETs! And visible in at least three shots. (Okay, so Spielberg stuck a Yoda gag into [E.T.](#), but come on....)

Slavery exists on Tattooine while the galaxy is under the rule of the Republic (the good guys) but doesn’t exist by the time of the Empire (the bad guys). That doesn’t make much sense. And why would anyone need slaves anyway? Droids are a dime a dozen. In fact, Anakin has built one -- C-3P0! (Which starts another plot problem -- why doesn’t C-3P0 recognize the family name of Skywalker when he’s purchased by Luke’s uncle in *Star Wars*? Surely he can remember the name of his creator! And in a strange coincidence, Vader and C-3P0 never come face to face in the other films.)

And speaking of droids, why are there armies of robot battle droids now, yet in later films these have all been replaced by human soldiers? Doesn’t make a whole lot of sense.

McGregor’s “rat tail” of hair changes side throughout the movie -- I guess Lucas was too busy making animated characters fart than to worry about continuity involving his human actors.

And when Qui-Gon meets with an untimely death, how come his body doesn’t dematerialize like every other deceased Jedi’s does? Not enough left in the budget for day-glow pyjamas for Liam Neeson?

There are some moments in the film that work. The last ten minutes of this movie rock, particularly the lightsaber duel between our Jedi heroes and Darth Maul. It is, finally, a human moment, with human conflict being played out. But it doesn’t work as well as it should because Maul has no characterization to speak of. He has ten minutes of screentime in the whole film and is nothing more than a token bad guy; we never find out anything that would make us hate him other than the fact that he picked his costume out from the “Bad Guy” wardrobe trailer. Plus, the fight is interrupted by some force field screens that appear and disappear for no logical or explainable reason, save that they serve to artificially heightens the tension.

The big action set piece of the film, the pod-car race, is visually impressive, but, much like the rest of the film, it fails to grip the audience. In fact, the whole scene is silly. In order to win Anakin’s freedom, the best idea that two Jedi knights could come up with was a glorified stock car race for Anakin’s pink slip. This is the best idea Lucas could come up with? This reeks of something out of [Dukes of Hazzard](#), not a galaxy far, far away. But pod racers mean more toys to sell.

And make no mistake – as Lucas is now able to manipulate every pixel that appears in his film, he also controls all the (excessive) hype and all the (over-)merchandising. He could be somewhat forgiven if he could say, “Hey look, I needed some bucks to make this movie so I sold the merchandising rights. I’m a filmmaker. I care about what’s on the screen, that’s what matters. That’s my vision, that’s the story I want to tell. Yoda golf club socks? I have nothing to do with

that.”

But he can't say that because it's been his plan all along. While making the original *Star Wars*, Fox offered Lucas \$500,000 for the merchandising and sequel rights. He refused the offer and holds those rights to this day, begetting a cottage industry that produces such wonderful products as the Darth Vader disco light, the Ewok movies, and kids' books like *Darth Maul Galactic Games and Puzzles*. (In fact, Ewoks represent the ultimate marketing success – everyone knows what an Ewok is, yet the word “Ewok” is never mentioned in *Return of the Jedi*, except buried deep in the credits. But I digress. And any woman who goes to bed with a guy wearing any *Star Wars* underwear should, before stomping out the door and leaving him, say, “Aren't you a little short for a stormtrooper?” But I digress again.)

It's difficult to remove the film from the hype and treat it as a separate entity. And that is not fair. But neither is the complete media bombardment that Lucas has foisted upon us all. And it's all to the detriment of his film: no film could live up to all this hype.

And there is no question that this is a quest for bucks. Yes, *TPM* was not a cheap film to make (\$120,000,000 or so), but Lucas owns it, financed it and *knows* he will make his money back in the first week, enough to produce the next two *Star Wars* films in the second week, and enough for a couple of *Howard the Duck* sequels in the third. So why all the merchandising tie-ins? Do we really need thirty-five different *Star Wars* books such as those that came out on May 3? Why does Lucas have a \$2 billion cross-marketing deal with Pepsico? Why are we going to be so inundated with hype, crass marketing tactics and mass-produced commercialism that we are all going to hate this film, no matter how good it is?

Is this the future of filmmaking?

I have in front of me a shopping flyer from a large, multinational department store chain (who shall remain nameless, but their initials are Wal-Mart). Over twelve pages, they offer such tie-ins as computer games, action figures, alarm clocks, toy lightsabers, model kits, jigsaw puzzles, 3D puzzles, games, playing cards, banners, books, doodle bags, skateboards, inflatable pool toys, books-on-tape, N64 games, a *Star Wars* Monopoly set, stickers, towel and facecloth set, dinnerware sets, watches, bedding coordinates, 20 different collector Pepsi cans, T-shirts, ball caps, runners, sandals and at least ten different Lego sets. My favourite items were the Anakin Skywalker sleeping bag (\$33.86), the Jar Jar Inflatable Pool (\$29.97 and recalled due to safety defects), the Darth Maul Interactive Talking Bank (\$49.97), Dancing Jar Jar (\$49.97), and the Lightsaber Duel Lego set (\$8.93) which features tiny Lego Qui-Gon and Darth Maul figures ready to do battle, smiling those cute Lego smiles even though in the movie both characters meet

rather nasty ends. To purchase one of every *Star Wars* item listed in this flyer would cost me just a fraction under \$3400 (plus PST and GST). And this does not begin to cover the myriad of tie-in products available.

Is this the future of filmmaking?

Two young men sitting behind me in the theatre were seeing *The Phantom Menace* for the fifth time (on only its third day in release). The theatre was filled with 12-year old kids and I felt very sad for them. All the hype and all the product and media tie-ins are telling these poor kids that this is a good movie. They are being lied to. The hype is training them to accept mediocrity as excellence. This is a mediocre film. Wonderful to look at and stunning eye-candy, to be sure. But a very mediocre motion picture.

Is *this* the future of filmmaking?

If the *Star Wars* mythos is about finding the force within yourself to conquer your fears and do good in the universe, then why are there expensive toy figures of characters that had only 3 micro-seconds of screen time? If it's about realizing that no soul is irredeemable no matter how lost it has become, then why are there four different covers for the \$35 hardcover novelization except to squeeze every last nickel out of fans? If it is about finding something bigger than yourself that's worth fighting and dying for, then why has it been demeaned to the point that Zellers is selling Darth Maul boxer shorts?

Star Wars, like *Star Trek*, is no longer (if either of them ever really were) an uplifting moral fable – it's now just an industry, just a product, just a money machine, just a marketing strategy.

It's all come down to selling Yoda golf club socks.

And are we going to have to endure *The Phantom Menace: Special Edition* in 20 years?

Star Wars: A New Hope succeeded because it was fast, fun, full of characters you could identify with and relate to, and offered a simple spiritual message of inner strength and belief.

The Empire Strikes Back succeeded the most of all four *Star Wars* films because director Irvin Kershner, writer Laurence Kasdan and the cast and the crew had the gall to actually take the material seriously and believe in it.

Return of the Jedi is less of a film than it is a toy commercial.

The Phantom Menace is no fun, has no characters worth relating to, can't be taken seriously and subverts the original's spiritual message.

And it's not even a very good toy commercial.

— J.W.H.

3001: The Final Odyssey

by Arthur C. Clarke

Del Rey Books; March 1998; ISBN0-345-42349-6; 272 pp.; \$8.99

The last of the Big Three has finished the last chapter of his *magnum opus*. Like most of Clarke's latest solo work, *3001* is really no more than an excuse for Clarke to present to the reader a travelogue through the future of his imagination. There is no characterization to speak of, nary a plot development until half way through the book, and then the monumental, galactical goings-on are tossed off with as little fuss as a rumpled sport coat after a day at the office. That being said, this is still Clarke's most effective work in some time. Because it's Clarke, we forgive the lack of character development – we really weren't expecting any anyway. The *Odyssey* series' most compelling character continues to be the Monolith, that strange artifact of alien origin. And don't let the title fool you – Clarke has left things wide open for another sequel. Is that Gentry Lee I hear warming up his word processor?

— J.W.H.

Winter Rose

by Patricia McKillip

Ace Books; ISBN 0-441-00438-5; 262 pp.; \$7.99

The author of *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld* has a new magical story to tell, once again as deep as any of the old fairy tales. Patricia McKillip wrote *Winter Rose* with the intensity of *Tam Lin* or *Rose Red*. But this is no mere re-telling of old stories.

“The well was one of the wood's secrets: a deep spring as clear as light, hidden under an overhang of dark stones down which the briar roses fall, white as snow, red as blood, all summer long. The vines hide the water unless you know to look. I found it one hot afternoon when I stopped to smell the roses. Beneath their sweet scent lay something shadowy, mysterious: the smell of earth, water, wet stone. I moved the cascading briars and looked down at my own reflection.”

The characters and the sense of place are sharply realized. “Don't fret. Everyone runs from such things now and then; it's only human. People gather, and drink, and dance, feelings begin to fly like trapped birds, things get spoken without words, music suggests things that simply can't be... Lovers suddenly wear too-familiar faces, and other faces promise other worlds...”

McKillip is clearly a master storyteller working at her full strength.

— Paula Johanson

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Still more "Young and Slothful"! Proof that Brian Mulroney is related to a hamster (it says so on the cover)!

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A gazillion reviews! The **Under The Ozone Hole** Quiz! Plus reviews, reviews and reviews. Plus Star Trek: Voyageur.

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Special *Apollo 11* Anniversary Issue! News, reviews and funny stuff. (A note to collectors: there are eight different covers for this issue. Ain't photocopiers wonderful?)

Number Nine

Worldcon in Winnipeg! The Robert Runté Guide to Fandom! Canadian Facts! Sean Stewart Interview! Profiles of Catherine Girczyc and Don H. DeBrandt! Plus Clam Shoot news!

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WHAT OTHERS HAVE SAID ABOUT UTOH:

- "Have you no standards at all?"
-- Robert Runté
- "I read it. I laughed. I fell asleep."
-- Cath Jackel
- "We keep ours in the bathroom."
-- Dale L. Sproule and Sally McBride
- "... sad ... past [its] prime ..."
-- Nicholas Watchman, *Sempervivum #1.1*
- "You are NOT going to like what I will be saying about it."
-- John Mansfield

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Yes, I need to purchase **Under The Ozone Hole** back issues.

Some strange primal urge is making me do this. Can't stop. Must... send... you money... \$500 per back issue.... can't stop.... here, take my Enron, JDS Uniphase and Bre-X shares.....

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Spacehound Skylark of the Stars and Beyond

by F. F. "Bones" Norman

Professor Crane Quackinbush sat in his lab, royally pissed off. He had just figured out a principle of quantum physics which might allow the controlled total conversion of matter to energy. Or not. It didn't work.

"Fornication," Crane said, leaning his arm on the table in the spilled root beer.

"Hi! Whatcha doin', Quacky?" asked the professor's red-haired girlfriend.

"Oh, Muffy," said Crane, "my secret formula didn't work. I added the eleven herbs and spices but I can't crack the secret recipe."

"Don't sweat it, Bigdaddykins," said Muffy, her solidly packed chest heaving as she chewed her gum. "Everything will come out fine."

Suddenly, 23 armed men crashed into the lab. "Must be some of Bob Camshafter's men!" Crane shouted. "Hit the floor, Toots!" She did as quickly as she could.

"Quick, Muffy! Give me your guns!" Crain said. She pulled a pair of 45s from her shirt and handed them over. With a gun in each hand, firing from the hip, he let out a steady stream of fire power in the general direction of the attacking bad guys. He realized just as he ran out of bullets that firing two-handed without lining up the gun sights first is a bloody waste of time. And bullets. Still, he was amazed at how many of them he hit without really taking proper aim, while they, supposedly well-trained professionals, couldn't hit him at all, despite taking careful aim and firing from point-blank range.

"All right, Professor," said a bad guy through the noise of battle, "give us the klysteron!"

"The what?"

"The fornicating klysteron!"

"I don't have one!"

"Aren't you Dr. Wolfgang Saganhoffer?"

"No."

"Fornication!"

"Wolfgang lives next door."

"Oh, sorry."

After the bad guys left, Muffy said, "Gee, I sure they don't hurt Wolfie. I sure like him."

"He'll be okay," said Krane, staring at Muffy's magnificent mounds.

"He's a big boy."

"I know."

"Hi, Doc. Hi, Muffy," said the paper boy, tossing Craine's newspaper into some large beakers full of Kool Aid and dry ice. "Hey, Doc, guess what? I just invented a cheap method of controlled total conversion of matter to energy."

"Fornication," said the Professor. "Ah, but I bet an untrained dolt like you couldn't possibly put that discovery to any practical use."

"Yeah, I guess. Except I made this conversion drive starcraft out of this abandoned oil tanker I found. I was thinking of going to Tau Ceti. Wanna go?"

"No!" shouted Krain. "I don't want to go for a ride in your stupid oil tanker!!"

The paper boy went on to become overlord of the galaxy and he locked Cwaine and Muffy in a prison on the planet McGibble IV. He forced the Professor to work endlessly on projects to benefit mankind, and forced Muffy to wear low-cut, slinky dresses in the daytime. Soon, the pressure became too much for Kraine to bear.

"That's enough!" he screamed at his former paper boy. "I can't bear it anymore!!"

"Oh, all right," said the former paperboy. "Muffy, take off your dress."

"That's not what I really meant," said Crainne.

"What did you mean?"

"I'm pissed off! I've spent the entire story so far being pissed off! This isn't any good at all. I quit! I'm going to get a job in a Heinlein juvenile novel."

"Oh," cried Muffy, attempting to refasten her dress which kept popping open at the slightest provocation. "I didn't expect that to happen. Oh, well."

Quain went on to his career in Heinlein novels and was still pissed off all the time. The paper boy stayed galactic overlord until he was 42 when he and Muffy retired to a small star cluster orbiting the Lesser Magellanic Cloud. Professor Saganhoffer survived the attack thanks to his collection of trained attack skinks. Bob Camshafter never got the klysteron, nor did he ever find out just what a klysteron was.

"Fornication," said Bob.

Part Two – Ignores Part One

The silver, dart-shaped spacecraft swung madly through space. "Fornication!" yelled Captain Dwayne "Spunky" Spongester over the roar of the engines as he grabbed at the steering wheel. His ship, the small freighter *Mulrone*y, was totally out of control, its course twisting and tumbling like errant fireworks. It was a good thing Spongester had put on his driving gloves, otherwise he might not have been able to grip the wheel.

"Quick, Mavis," he shouted to young woman in the co-pilot's seat, "switch to auxiliary!"

Princess Mavis Octavia quickly scanned the controls. She'd had only limited spaceship flying experience as a member of the Royal Court of Whimbilden, but she knew enough to know they were in trouble. "Which one?"

"Auxiliary!" The ship lurched and the fuzzy dice hanging off the rear view mirror hit him in the face. "There," he pointed, "the red one!"

She pressed the button, her expression looking more worried. "What's wrong with the ship?"

"Throttle's jammed open! And I checked the pedal and it's not stuck! I'll bet one of Kling Davar's henchmen is behind this!"

"Like the one I saw hanging around the ship before we took off?"

"Yeah, like that one! Fornication, auxiliary's not working either. Hit the manual override — the blue one!"

She pressed the blue button, but *Mulrone*y continued dizzily careening out of control. Spongester knew they couldn't take much more of this.

"We can't take much more of this! Nothing's working!" All the controls were inoperative. With the throttle jammed open and steering gone, it was just a matter of time until they flew into a star or an asteroid. Spongester began to think their future was hopeless.

"I have an idea," said Mavis. "What if we just turned the engines off?"

"WHAT?!? Fornication, Mavis, if we turn the engines off, we'll lose power!"

“Yes, so?”

“So, if we lose power, the engines won’t have any more power and they’ll turn off, and if they turn off the Law of Infernal Inertia says we’ll lose all our forward momentum and slow down— Wait! I’ve got it! Stand by! I’m going to turn off the engines!” Spongester turned the ignition key to “off” and the main engines cut out. The cabin was filled with relief and silence.

“Good work, Mavis. We’ll be drifting for a while, but at least now I’ll be able to fix this crate. First, I’d better find out where we are. Pass me the map.”

Reaching into the glove compartment, Mavis pulled out a folded, dog-eared, wrinkled, coffee-stained piece of paper. “This?”

“Yeah.” Spongester unfolded and studied the paper. “Ah, I thought so. We’re right on course for this uncharted planet,” he said, pointing at the map, “and if I’m right, we’ll drift right into a perfect orbit.”

Just then, Arnold the Android entered the cockpit. “Sir!” he declared imperiously, “that was the most horrific example of space flight I’ve seen this century. You could have killed everyone and dented me.”

Spongester snorted. Arnold the Android was entirely made of cantbustium, the strongest substance known. “Right. We need to fix this crate fast before Kling Davar finds out we escaped his devious plot. You go outside and do the dangerous stuff, I’ll stay inside and supervise. Mavis, let me know when we get near that planet.”

Unfortunately, Spongester was wrong. The *Mulrone* did not drift into a perfect orbit about the uncharted planet. In fact, it crashed on the planet.

“Fornication,” said Spongester.
The trio survived.

To be continued....

Part Three – The Syndrome Factor

Captain Dwayne “Spunky” Spongester of the late space freighter *Mulrone* was adamant. It didn’t matter that his spaceship had just crashed into an uncharted planet, it didn’t matter that he was stranded on said planet with only two companions (Princess Mavis Octavia of the Royal Court of Crunchiebar and Arnold the Android), it didn’t matter that right now Kling Davar’s henchmen were quite probably closing in, and it didn’t matter that his hair was mussed and he’d lost his comb in the crash. No, what matter now was that there was no fornicating way that he was going to accompany Arnold the Android.

“I won’t do it,” insisted Spongester, “no way.”

“It won’t do any harm,” pleaded Mavis. “In fact, it might be fun. I want to watch!”

“You’re sick. I won’t do it.”

“Please,” Mavis pouted. “Would you do it for me?”

“For you? I doubt it. I don’t know anything about you, except you’re supposed to be leading me to your bank machine to pay off your gambling debt to me. I know those things are supposed to be everywhere, but there’s just never one around when you need one. —Fornication, quit pouting! Oh, all right, I’ll do it!”

He stopped pacing, and sat beside Arnold. “Sir,” said the android, “you do not have to do this. If you’re embarrassed....”

“No, I’ve done this before. Surprised, Mavis? I guess you don’t know much about me either.”

“Sir, I did serve for a time as an entertainment unit on Vegass III. Perhaps I should lead? I think you’ll feel more comfortable. Jump in when you’re ready.”

“Yeah, okay. I am a little nervous. You start.”

“Very good, sir. Ahem.

“Row row row your boat

“Gently down the stream

“Merrily merrily merrily merrily

“Life is but a—”

“Arrgh!” shouted Spongester as he jumped up from the Android. “I can’t do it! I just can’t, I’m not ready—”

“Not ready for what?” asked the voice of the man coming over the hill.

“Look!” cried Arnold. “It’s Admiral Runté!”

“Good thing I hit the emergency locator button just before we crashed last chapter.”

“Sir, I read the last chapter and I don’t recall you doing any such thing.”

“Ssssh!”

“Well, Spongester,” and the Admiral, “what brings you here?”

“I could ask you the same thing, Admiral. When I last saw you on the cover of this zine, you were trapped on a planet of desperate women with a secret.”

Mavis could stand it no longer. “Spongester, you know this man? He’s responsible for deaths of millions of Crunchiebarians.”

“He is? How?”

Why is Spongester unwilling to sing?

How did the Admiral kill millions of beings?

Did the writer actually stop at this point because he was too lazy to think of a way out?

To be continued....

Part Four – The Dog Days of Space

Sir!”

“Huhh - wha—”

“Sir, wake up. The ship has crashed!”

Spongester stirred. He opened his eyes and looked up at Arnold the Android.

“The ship – out of danger?”

“No, sir. As you know, Bob, er, um, Dwayne, we crashed on an uncharted planet! Remember?” Spongester shook his head trying to recall what had happened last issue.

“Forget that,” said Arnold, reading over my shoulder, “last issue was all a dream!”

“Oh, that’s right. I remember now. Admiral Runté, the campfire sing-a-long, Princess Mavis – all a dream.”

“Well, no. Princess Mavis is real.”

“Fornication!”

“She salvaged the navigational computer and is trying to figure out where we are.”

“But I know where we are! We’re on an uncharted planet! Help me up! Lift that impossibly heavy girder off my legs.”

With Arnold’s help, Spongester struggled through the wreckage and found Mavis in the smashed cockpit. She’d reassembled the navigational computer, but couldn’t find a spare plug to plug it in.”

“Let me see that,” said Spongester. “Two prong or three prong?”

“Three,” said Mavis.

“Fornication! This ship isn’t grounded! Curse this ancient wiring!”

“The ship looks grounded to me,” said Arnold as he noted the strange unearthly yet alien terrain that lay outside the crashed ship.

“Never mind that cheap verbal humour now — you’ve got to stand

around and watch while I heroically save you!”

Spongester pushed away from the startled android and stood upright. His legs, which a moment ago lay crushed beneath a heavy steel beam, now supported his full weight.

“Amazing what a band-aid can do,” mumble Arnold under his breath.

Spongester moved slowly but deliberately to a side panel, popped the cover and drew out the back-up navigational computer (also known as a map). He unfolded it over a pile of debris, and studied it intently. Finally, he said, “I know where we are.”

“Where?” cried Mavis.

“Right here,” he said, and pointed at the map, “on this uncharted planet.”

Arnold sighed heavily. The author only had one good joke and he was milking it for more than it was worth. “So we know where we are. We are on an uncharted planet.”

“Not just *any* uncharted planet,” said Spongester smugly. “We are on *this* uncharted planet.”

“Ahhh. And just *where* is *this* uncharted planet?”

“Why, it’s right... um... it’s right, er... oh, fornication....” Spongester studied the map again. “Aha! Here we go, we’re in the constellation Rand McNally.”

Arnold shook his head. “No. Try again.”

“Oh, okay. We’re in the Yaw Yklim galaxy.”

“No, you idiot—”

“Near the planets of Nrutas and Retipuj—”

“—you have the map upside down—”

“Oh, boys!” Mavis interrupted. “I fixed the radio. And it’s only two prongs!”

“Give me that!” yelled Spongester, diving for the radio. He grabbed the controls, pausing just long enough to deliver the following exposition: “This radio is the only communications link we have. Only this radio can save us. Our humanity is fragile. If something happens to this radio, I figure we’re only twenty minutes away from cannibalism. I’m going to turn it on now. Pray that nothing unexpected happens.”

He flipped the send switch.

“Mayday mayday mayday! Oh, save me please please please please save me! Leave the rest to die but please save me. I don’t want to eat the robot but I may have to soon. And he looks way too crunchy. So save me! Save me from breaking my teeth on the robot! Please! I’m worth it! And I don’t have dental coverage! Space Corps Control is too cheap for that! Save me—”

“Stop it,” said Arnold. “The signal’s being jammed. And look at the sensors! Another ship is approaching! A ship that’s really big and powerful—”

“And dangerous, no doubt!”

“Yeah. Anyway, the other ship is broadcasting and totally overpowering our signal. You want to hear it?”

“Golly, yes!”

“Put on those headphones and flip the switch from ‘send’ to ‘receive’.”

Spongester did and listened intently. His face turned white. His jaw went slack. His wrists went limp. He unplugged the headphones so that Mavis and Arnold could hear the signal, a strange, alien screeching sound.

“What are they saying?” asked Mavis. “Should we turn on the translator?”

“No need for that,” said Spongester. “I speak ‘alien’.”

He concentrated mightily for a moment. His forehead wrinkled, his brow furrowed, his ears wiggled. A small lock of hair curled down the middle of his forehead. Finally, he spoke again.

“Fornication! It is an alien invasion fleet. Their world has lost a vital natural resource, and they are going to invade every world they encounter in a mad, but yet strangely insane quest to re-acquire as much of this rare but powerful resource as they can. They will not rest, they will not sleep. Death means little to them. They fear nothing. They are a proud race, a

warrior race. They are of a hive-mind, serving their leader-masters, who will relentlessly drive their worker-slave-drones to attack at the slightest provocation by using their incredible over-mind mental prowess, developed through eons of forced evolution, genetic engineering and just plain dumb luck. They have powerful phased-light-photon-quantum-torpedo-blaster-ray stun-guns! They are ugly. They have five arms, four legs, sexual appendages the size of an import car, and acid for blood. They can grow replacement limbs, but oddly, they sound like Preston Manning. They are genetically engineered time-travelling macro-nano-teched armoured fighting robotic death-machine soldier-clones—”

“From outer space?”

“Yes! Genetically engineered time-travelling macro-nano-teched armoured fighting robotic death-machine soldier-clones. *From outer space!!!* We are but flies to them. Or fleas. Or fleas on a fly. An annoyance. They plan to conquer us with the same ease that I can step on a lowly bug. They are irredeemable, oddly just like Preston Manning. We’re doomed. Earth is doomed. The whole quadrant is doomed. Perhaps even the universe itself. Even I, myself, oh so glorious me, am doomed. Fornication!”

“Wow. You translated all that?”

“Well, no, not really. I just inferred it. The message is only three words long.”

“Oh. Well, what is the message?”

“*Mars needs puppies!*”

{{Parts One, Two and Three were published in (respectively) issues One, Two and Four of UTOH. Part Four was recently unearthed in the bottom of a birdcage and is being published for the first time anywhere.

We’ve been assured that this is the author’s preferred version.

F.F. “Bones” Norman’s fame in Canadian SF literary circles is perhaps second only to Robert Gunderson’s. His previous works include the novels Spam Must Die!, Muffy the Vampire Layer, and A Block of Fish. He also wrote “The Blanderputty Matrix” episode of Babylon 5.

Currently, Norman is a crossing-guard instructor on Salt Spring Island. In his spare time, he volunteers as a soccer goal post.}}



“Those who cast the votes decide nothing. Those who count the votes decide everything.”

— Joseph Stalin

undertheozonhole.blogspot.com

The Call of Technology

by John W. Herbert

I called a friend on my cell phone last night. I was going home from a friend's house and Tracey and I had made one of those tentative sorta maybe kinda plans to perhaps do something the next day. I didn't want to call too late, so I dialed her up from my truck on my way home. We talked for about forty-five minutes – the interesting thing about this is that the drive home is only about ten minutes, so I spent half an hour or so wandering around my house talking on the cell phone.

"How long have you had your cell phone?" she asked.

"About two and a half years," I replied. Since I live almost to an hour away from the store I own, I had decided it would be a necessity in case of an emergency.

"Don't you feel weird walking around talking on one of those?"

"No," I replied. I didn't mention that the only time I ever felt weird talking on it was when I was downtown in front of McDonald's reporting into Tracey on a spy mission I'd just done for her. It's hard to be discreet while shouting to be heard over cars, buses, trucks, and bongo drumming street kids. Someone yelling, "They didn't suspect a thing!" into a phone in the middle of downtown attracts a variety of questioning glances.

"Well, I don't have one," she said. "I don't even have a microwave oven or a dishwasher."

I knew she didn't have a dishwasher because every time I visit her house she starts doing the dishes. What I didn't realize was that she was *sans* microwave. I have one – I just can't remember the last time I used it. "I do things the old fashioned way," she said.

It's not that my friend is a Luddite – she's had plenty of computer training and could run rings around me on Excel or Lotus, although I could probably do the same to her on Duke Nukem. But the sentiment she's expressing is one you hear all too frequently these days – enough with technology, already.

The pace of modern life is increasing exponentially. I'm working harder and harder to fall further and further behind. I am being assimilated by the mind control drone-toadies of the corporate thought-cults. Resistance is futile. Greed is good. Money is everything. Last year's annual report is this year's religious relic.

And the rapid advance of the technology that is supposed to make my life simpler just makes it more frustrating. Thanks to e-mail, cell phones, ELTs, fax, voicemail, GPS, modems, call forwarding, pagers, answering machines and satellite communication I can be reached twenty-four hours a day by anyone.

The bottom line is that I am no longer unreachable. I no longer have an excuse to be inaccessible. I can't leave work behind because it follows me everywhere, hanging on my belt like a leech. (Sure, I could just switch off my cell phone, but then I would feel guilty, dammit!) I've been called at the beach, in my truck, on a date, in my sleep, and yes, in my bathroom. And worse yet, most of the time I get phoned for idiotic reasons:

"Hello?"

"Yeah, John? This is Svend at the store."

"Hi, Svend. What's up?"

"Yeah. There was this guy who wanted to sell you some new maps."

"Uh, huh."

"So I told him you weren't here."

"Great. Thanks."

"Is that okay?"

"I wasn't there, was I?"

"Ahh, nope."

"Then that was fine."

"Oh. Okay. Well, bye."

"Bye."

And another 75 cents gets transferred from my coffers to Rogers Cantel. Having a cell phone is a convenience, but often it's an annoying and frustrating convenience. Sort of like public transit.

The only person I've talked to at all on my cell phone in the last month is Tracey, and although I've certainly enjoyed that, it wasn't the use it was intended for. My staff rarely calls me on the cell phone anymore because I usually get annoyed at them unless they're calling about a disaster on the magnitude of my business burning down. (Now they get their revenge by leaving long, rambling messages on my answering machine at home.)

The point is that all these technological delights are taking away our humanity. E-mail – who would've thought that people would get worked up about a phone call you type? I don't want to be linked to machines, I want to be linked to people.

Clearwater, B.C., fields of daisies, and not a cell phone in sight – some days, that sounds pretty darn good.

From the "Better Late Than Never" Files.....

Former **Under the Ozone Hole** co-editor Karl Johanson interviewed author Robert Charles Wilson for **UTOH** back in 1992. Karl promised to give Robert a copy of the interview, and on April 23, 2005, Karl presented Robert with a copy of **UTOH Number Two**, the issue that contained his interview.

Robert was in Victoria signing his new novel *Spin* at Bolen Books, appearing with Robert J. Sawyer as part of their "Rob and Bob Tour '05."



Judy

by E.B.Klassen

About the only time I ever met Judith Merrill was centuries ago at a **V-Con**. There were other folk there too, but Judy was the most important one for me, as Judy Merrill changed my life. Not at that year's **V-Con**, no. But a lifetime earlier in Alberta.

This was during the Golden Age of Science Fiction; that is to say I was about fourteen years old at the time (which is everybody's Golden Age of SF according to Damon Knight). When I was younger, I read everything I could lay my hands on, including an encyclopaedia from 1960 and books with no covers the titles of which I never discovered. There was a period when my Dad and I read westerns together. But slowly my reading began to focus more and more on SF, and soon I was reading it almost exclusively.

These were the days when two novels a day was a slow day; days when I read everything and remembered it all. Asimov and Bradbury of course, and Verne and Welles too. Not much Heinlein, but thousands of short stories, novellas and novelettes. And then high school and a new library devoured in six months. And then *England Swings SF*.

It's hard to remember what an effect this book had on the world as I knew it. The "World's Best" collections were starting to develop a

tension between what was called Old and New SF. Odd stories were cropping up, stories that had Bogart-like characters and less than happy endings. And I opened *England Swings SF* and there was the Voice of Judy sounding a lot like Steven Stills: "There's something happening here/ and what it is ain't exactly clear." Judy had started reading a bunch of new English writing and discovered a changed world. And best of all, she had every intention of dragging me along into it with her. And she did.

I haven't read *England Swings SF* in several years. But I remember that when I first read it I thought this was absolutely fabulous. That half the stories had no SF content at all didn't faze me for a minute. For a kid in Edmonton, this was the lifesaving drink of cool water in a cultural desert. And with her introductions and her forwards, Judy changed my life.

I got the chance to tell her so years later at that **V-Con**. By then my life had changed. I was no longer living in Edmonton, I had a life, an education, and a copy of *England Swings SF* that I had bought at the last library book sale. I asked her to sign it, I told her how she had changed everything with that book, and I said thank you. And you know, I really meant it. Thank you, Judith Merrill. And goodbye.



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- Spider Robinson (Science Fiction Writer)

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- Nina Munteanu (Science Fiction Writer)

"Wow! Nice work on the magazine guys! A very impressive start to your publishing empire!"

-Robert Aitken (Computer game designer, Sanctuary Woods Multimedia, Disney Interactive)

"I believe your input to the local Sci-Fi culture will prove invaluable. I am looking forward to the next edition! Not only for the short stories, but for the reviews and editorial commentaries as well."

- Virginia O'Dine (Science Fiction Writer)

"So, what do I think of the stories themselves? They're all good, deserving of publication, and many contained ideas that were original and thought provoking, making the magazine well worth the cover price."

- Ursula Pflug (Science Fiction Writer / Reviewer)

"I must say, I'm impressed. The stories were all top notch. And the packaging looks great."

-Paul Stockton (Publisher, Strawberry Jam Comics)

"I recently subscribed to Neo-OPSIS and read the first issue from cover to cover, thoroughly enjoyed the time spent".

-Bill Dean (Science fiction writer)

"Johanson's sense of humour, evident in both of his columns, is also conspicuously present in his pick for the issue's first story, "On The Road With Fiamong's Rule" by Sherry D. Ramsey. If I had to put a label to that sense of humour, I'd call it mainstream geek: two parts Jerry Lewis, one part Richard Feynman, a pinch of Firesign Theater and a twist of aggressive oddity."

-Jeremy Lyon (Reviewer Tangent Online)

"I recently received the copy you sent of Neo-opsis and I was quite pleased. The stories were strikingly good, lots better than I'd expected for the first issue of a semi-pro zine".

-Rich Horton (Reviewer for Locus Magazine)

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