

Steven Silver presents

ARGENTUS

Issue One
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\$3.00 or the Usual



Silver

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The Mine

Steven H Silver

Welcome to the first issue of *Argentus*. With luck, time, support and interest, I hope to continue to publish *Argentus* on an occasional “schedule” as all those ingredients come together. Each issue will contain what I hope are an interesting assortment of eclectic articles as well as a thematic mock section. In this first issue, the mock section is a collection of movie reviews written about films which have not been made based on books the critics enjoyed.

With nothing much to do in 2000, except plan programming for Chicon 2000, I decided I would begin to plan out a ‘zine. I made a few quiet comments to people who I was interested in including in this venture, and quickly decided that trying to get *Argentus* 1 out the door in 2000 was an insane and ludicrous prospect. Instead, I would aim for a May 2001 publication date. I missed that as well, partly because of my wife’s pregnancy, plans (now complete) to move into a new house, a three-book contract with DAW Books and various and sundry other reasons.

I didn’t feel I could back out of publishing either. In December, I had commissioned several pieces, one of which, Mike Resnick’s article about his favorite films about Africa, had already arrived. Also, Mike Glyer announced to the world that I was planning on publishing in his review of Chicon 2000 which appeared in *Locus* (thanks Mike). Finally, and most importantly, I *wanted* to publish *Argentus*.

Initially, I had viewed *Argentus* as having a specific theme: “Origins, Beginnings and Geneses,” as it was my

first issue. This theme quickly fell by the wayside as I decided to get articles which were interesting in and of themselves, rather than because they fit a specific theme. The only article which survives from that period is Pat Sayre McCoy’s memoir of her first professional sale, the story “Winter Roses.” The theme does carry forward in some of my other projects. The aforementioned DAW contract will reprint the first published SF, fantasy and horror by prominent (and not so prominent) authors. The anthologies, *First Horrors*, *Magical Beginnings* and *Maiden Voyages* should be available throughout 2002.

The only theme remaining in this issue is the final, mock section, which is made up of several reviews of science fiction films. I commissioned film reviewers to select a science fiction novel or story which they would like to see made into a movie. They could cast and staff the film however they chose, giving it the type of budget they wanted and then write a review of the final product. None of these films has been made, nor are plans in the works to make these specific films. I hope you enjoy their efforts.

ARGENTUS is irregularly published by Steven H Silver. All submissions, letters or other correspondence should be directed to him at 707 Sapling Lane, Deerfield, IL 60015-3969 or e-mailed to shsilver@sfsite.com. Issues of ARGENTUS are available for \$3.00 or “the usual.” The *Argentus* website can be found at <http://www.sfsite.com/~silverag/argentus.html>

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Thoughts on the State of Short Science Fiction

David A. Truesdale

When considering where the state of print magazine science fiction might be right now, I think it valuable and necessary to split this extended essay into two categories: the magazines (wherein the fiction is published), and the fiction itself. I will use the generic label science fiction as an umbrella designation encompassing fantasy, and all points in between.

The Magazines

During a recent online discussion a newer writer put forth that it was harder to sell a short story nowadays because the professional markets have been dwindling, to the degree that there were now only a few remaining. I happen to believe the opposite, if one distinction is granted. There is a difference between a professional magazine (as the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America {SFWA} defines it), and a *professionally paying market* (using the universally accepted SFWA minimum standard for payment, the only yardstick we have to go by). In defining for its own specific, organizational purposes what a professional magazine constitutes (for Active membership status), SFWA takes into consideration *paid circulation* (defined as 2,000 combined newsstand and subscription sales) and the requirement that any new publication must publish a minimum of three issues per year, *as well as* its minimum pay level of at least three cents per word.

If one wishes to adhere to SFWA standards for professional magazines, then the marketplace has dwindled by three in the past year. The venerable *Amazing Stories*, the genre's first and oldest (1926), with a troubled publishing history going back at least four decades folded (once again) with its Summer 2000 issue (the mishandling by its most recent owners, Wizards of the Coast, being a major contributing factor, in my opinion), Sovereign Media's *Science Fiction Age* fell by the wayside with its May 2000 issue, despite the fact that it was making money, though not enough to satisfy the owners, and *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine* was forced to close shop in late 2000 due to the death of its namesake and founder in September of 1999.

The death of these three genre magazines meant that only four U.S.-published "professional" science fiction magazines remained: *Analog*, *Asimov's SF*, *Fantasy &*

Science Fiction, and Sovereign Media's other genre magazine *Realms of Fantasy*.

Several other professional magazines continue to publish the occasional science fiction or sf-type story, but two of the more well known are not *sf* magazines, but publications that happen to publish some sf, as did the late *Omni* magazine which ceased publication several years ago (*Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, and *Playboy*—though long-time fiction editor Alice Turner was let go in early 2000 for reasons not related to her expertise, and all reading duties have been turned over to

a nameless cadre of "in house" readers), and another Wizards of the Coast magazine, *Dragon*, which is devoted to gaming and role-playing and only publishes one short fantasy story per month, almost exclusively in the sub-genre known as sword-and-sorcery.

At least for the time being, and while magazine numbers continue to erode across the board (as they have since the late 1970s, but most markedly in the 1980's and 90's), it would appear that *Analog*, *Asimov's* (both purchased from Dell Magazines in 1996 by Peter Kanter, but still under the Dell rubric), *F&SF* (purchased in 2000 from long-time publisher Ed Ferman by the magazine's editor since 1997, Gordon Van Gelder), and

Realms of Fantasy will be around for the foreseeable future. It is interesting to note that all three of the magazines folding in 2000 were full-sized ventures, and not digest-sized, with both *Amazing* and *Science Fiction Age* being published by those with very deep pockets (by sf genre magazine standards). Only *Marion Zimmer Bradley's Fantasy Magazine* did not have deep pockets, being subsidized from Ms. Bradley's own funds, and aided by relatively small advertising revenues (primarily from DAW books). Begun in 1988, *MZB's* would still be with us if only Ms. Bradley were. Three of the four surviving professional U.S.-based sf magazines are digest-sized (*Analog* and *Asimov's* opting for a slightly taller digest format beginning with their June 1998 issues, in hopes of better rack visibility, which incidentally increased their word count, it should be noted), with *Realms of Fantasy* the sole exception. As another data point, *Realms of Fantasy* is published bi-monthly, where *Analog*, *Asimov's*, and *F&SF* are published monthly (actually, eleven issues per year, each combining two monthly issues into a large "double issue"). And finally, the three surviving digests have the longest publishing





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track records of the remaining four. *Analog* (as *Astounding*) first published in 1930, *F&SF* first published in 1949, and *Asimov's* first published in 1977 (almost 25 years ago!). *Realms of Fantasy* first published in October of 1994, is the only slick, full-size, full-color, genre fiction magazine, and the only one with deep pockets and true full-saturation marketing/distribution.

Despite the advantages *Realms* seems to have going for it, it is still *Analog* which continues to outsell all other magazines, large or small, new or well-established. While one wishes continued success for *Realms*, it is not beyond the realm of impossibility to conjecture that it might be the field's next casualty down the road at some point, given the fate of its sister sf magazine *SF Age*. That it was making money, but not quite enough to satisfy the publisher, Sovereign Media (which owns a stable of highly profitable pop culture magazines in several areas, including wrestling), is cause for concern. If *Realms'* circulation should slide to the point where *SF Age* was cancelled, will it suffer the same fate? Such concerns are legitimate when magazines are owned by corporate publishers with other interests, where a genre magazine's fate is tied solely to the numbers, and where, in the case of *Realms*, the numbers (exorbitant production costs, etc.) are indeed large, it is but one of many magazines in a publisher's stable, and where hundreds of thousands of dollars are on the line at any given time.

To put this in perspective, and to illustrate how times have changed in our field—in at least one instance—I am reminded of what Ben Bova said after he became editor of *Analog* following the death of John W. Campbell in 1971. The following quote is taken from an interview in *Tangent* #6, Winter 1977. Substitute *Vogue* for *SF Age* or *Realms of Fantasy*, and Conde Nast for Sovereign Media to understand the parallel I'm trying to draw.

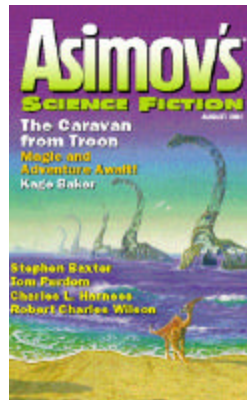
"The reason Conde-Nast has *Analog* is because it absorbed the Street & Smith publications back in 1960, and killed off most of the Street & Smith magazines, which were shaky. But they had this strange little science fiction magazine called *Astounding*, and this towering

figure named John Campbell running it, and they didn't know anything about science fiction but they knew that this magazine was the *number one* magazine in the field—and they liked being number one.

"And for crasser reasons, *Analog/Astounding* consistently makes a profit month after month. John Campbell used to say that *Analog* is a gold mine—a teeny weeny gold mine because it makes a very, very small profit—but it is consistent, and no publisher in his right mind will turn down a steady money maker. Even though it's a *small* amount of money it helps defray the overhead expenses, it looks good on the accounting books, and with something like *Vogue* where they make a million dollars one month and lose two hundred thousand the next, you know, there's always hysterics and heart attacks.

"*Analog* sails along, gaining readers, losing a few maybe when economic times are tough, but they come back again when times are better. So, it's interesting. We've lost *some* newsstand circulation over the past two years, but our subscription numbers are constantly rising."

Realizing that times have changed in the publishing industry over the past quarter century (as they did several times for various Real World reasons from the 30's through the war years of the 40's, and again from then on for various reasons), and that not all of the parallels are to be taken with equal weight, I still see a major philosophical difference between the attitude of Conde Nast (a major publisher of several magazines) toward *Analog*, and Sovereign Media's attitude toward *Science Fiction Age*. Both publishers were making small but adequate profits on their magazines, but one decided, in this current era of big business, instant gratification, and the need not only for profit but fairly substantial profit, to pull the plug on one of its money makers. A relatively small money maker given its other publications, but a money maker nonetheless. Contrast this publishing decision/philosophy with Conde Nast's decision to stick with *Astounding/Analog*.





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ANALOG—

1976 - 110,000

1979 - 104,600

—

1991 - 83,200

1992 - 80,000

1993 - 78,000

1994 - 78,000

1995 - 75,000

1996 - 70,000

1997 - No Statement of Ownership

1998 - 61,000

1999 - No Statement of Ownership

2000 - No Statement of Ownership

2001 - No Statement of Ownership

ASIMOV'S—

1991 - 79,800

1992 - 74,000

1993 - 72,000

1994 - 73,000

1995 - 69,000

1996 - 59,000

1997 - No Statement of Ownership

1998 - 48,000

1999 - No Statement of Ownership

2000 - No Statement of Ownership

2001 - No Statement of Ownership

F&SF—

1991 - 52,600, Subs = 40,000 of total sales

1992 - 68,900, Subs = 56,600

1993 - 56,100, Subs = 44,000

1994 - 57,500, Subs = 47,600

1995 - 51,800, Subs = 43,400

1996 - 51,600, Subs = 43,800

1997 - 45,600, Subs = 38,400

1998 - 39,700, Subs = 31,700

1999 - 34,800, Subs = 27,300

2000 - 32,600, Subs = 26,900

2001 - 30,000, Subs = 25,600

* Note that all figures reflect the previous year's numbers. I have rounded all numbers to the nearest hundred.

Inside the Numbers

It has been noted above that genre magazine circulations (and not just the sf genre, but most serial publications as well) have been on a slow, but steady decline since at least the 1980s. While there are several reasons for this (some obvious, and which have nothing to do with the quality of fiction being offered), I want to show a few figures here, and then make an observation or two concerning them (notably my "prediction," if you will, that *Realms of Fantasy* might well be the next magazine to bite the dust within the next few years {let's say five years, for those odds-makers among you}).

Above are circulation numbers from the 1990's (with minor gaps) for the "Big Three" magazines, (*Analog*, *Asimov's*, *F&SF*).

Here are *F&SF's* numbers for 2000, as given in the January 2001 issue: Average number of subscriptions for 2000 is 25,600. Nearest to filing date is 24,700. Newsstand sales for 2000 are 4,400. Nearest to filing date are 3,900. Average total of both subs and newsstand sales for 2000 is 30,000. Average total of both subs and newsstand sales nearest to filing date is 28,600.

Depending on which figure one wishes to use, the totals for *F&SF* are either 30,000, or 28,600. The vast majority of either number are represented by

subscriptions, as has been the case throughout not only its history, but also that of *Analog* and *Asimov's* as well. A strong and loyal subscriber base has proved historically crucial to the survival of genre magazines.

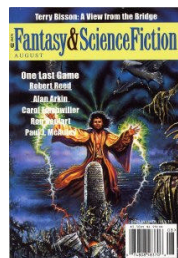
Realms of Fantasy's numbers for 2000, as given in the April 2001 issue: Average number of subscriptions for 2000 is 25,600. Nearest to filing date is 25,600 (the

same). Newsstand sales for 2000 are 9,500. Nearest to filing date are 16,800. Average total of both subs and newsstand sales for 2000 is 35,200. Average total of both subs and newsstand sales nearest to filing date is 42,300.

Depending on which figure one wishes to use, the totals for *Realms of Fantasy* are either 35,200, or 42,300.

The latter (nearest to filing date) figure for both magazines is the more unreliable and more subject to fluctuation for various reasons, one of them being that certain subscribers' renewals may be pending at any given month but not yet received, and this leads to differences in totals (especially since *F&SF* is monthly, and *Realms* is bi-monthly). I prefer, therefore, to use the yearly statistics, which provide a more accurate view.

Let's look quickly once again at the figures listed above for the last year given (total average yearly sales, i.e., subs and newsstand sales combined):



Analog—

1998 - 61,000

2000 - Not Given

2001 - Not Given

Asimov's—

1998 - 48,000

2000 - Not

Given

2001 - Not

Given

F&SF—

2001 - 30,000, Subs = 25,600

Realms of Fantasy—

2001 - 35,200, Subs = 25,600



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Looking at the last two magazines' subscription totals is, quite frankly, amazing. They are identical. That the slick, high-profile, full-color, full-sized, extensively marketed/distributed, full-of-high-cost ads magazine, geared toward the pop culture craze of the (multi-media) fantasy audience, has only the same amount of paid subscribers as the low end of one of the most respected, award-winning, long-standing, and traditionally low-budget, "family-owned" digest magazines is, like I say, nothing short of amazing. The only difference is in *Realms of Fantasy's* newsstand sales, which amounts only to 5,200 above *F&SF's*, spread over an entire year.

As fine a magazine as *SF Age* was, garnering award nominations and even winning a Nebula, Sovereign Media dropped it because it didn't make *enough* money. Given the decades-long slide in magazine circulation in all major professional magazines, can *Realms of Fantasy* be far behind?

Contrast *Realms'* numbers with those for *SF Age* for its last three years:

SF Age—
1998 - 43,300, Subs = 23,500
1999 - 34,100, Subs = 18,800
2000 - 25,100, Subs = 15,600

We hope not, of course, and though the raw numbers are always open to interpretation, they give cause for serious and considered reflection.

The Upside

This cursory examination of the state of the professional short story magazine market began with a demarcation between the magazines, and the fiction contained therein, in response to the assumption that it is more difficult to sell to a professional market today, because there are so few left. While not addressing this assertion here (though I had hoped to; I will do so next time), I have spoken in general terms about those magazines considered professional by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America according to their criteria, as setup for the answer to the original online comment. I also began this essay with a further distinction, between what SFWA considered a professional magazine market, and those magazines paying a professional rate. I fear that the length of this initial installment has precluded the examination of the latter, which will hopefully lend substantial proof to my view that there are more professionally *paying* markets than ever before in the history of the field. And why it is not more difficult to sell to a professionally paying market today.

While not necessarily SFWA sanctioned, there are more professionally paying markets (print *and* electronic/online) than ever before in the history of the field, and I'll list many of them (and offer comment on a few) next time. A few of them are being given notice in Year's Best collections, and have even begun to win awards.





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“Winter Roses” Bloom

Patricia Sayre McCoy

After I had been writing for awhile in an APA and passing stories and ideas around with a group of friends, I realized that one could actually sell them and get money. Cool thought. I had been a fan of Marion Zimmer Bradley’s Darkover series for many years and I somehow got a flyer saying that she was accepting stories for her next Darkover anthology, eventually entitled *The Snows of Darkover*. (I had suggested that title, since the flyer said she was also looking for title suggestions. I have no idea how many other people may have suggested that title). So I decided to write a Darkover story. It was only later that I learned I had written “fanfic.”

My approach towards story ideas is to look at either “what happened next” after traditional folk and fairy tales end (as I do in my story “The Last Swan Princess”, to be published in *Sword and Sorceress XX*), or to look for the story only mentioned in passing in other tales and books. In the case of Darkover, I remembered reading in *The Bloody Sun*, that there were three Keepers who had fled their towers without giving up their vows. Elorie, heroine of *The Bloody Sun*, was one; Callista Alton of *The Forbidden Tower*, was the second; and the third was Ysabet of Dalereuth. Elorie’s and Callista’s stories had been written, but there was no further mention of Ysabet. So I decided to write that one. In my story, Ysabet fled the Tower because her father, an exceptionally strong telepath, had forced her to become a Keeper. After his death, Ysabet lost her Keeper’s training because she had never really wanted it in the first place. Because of some complicated inheritance issues her cousin, the senior Keeper, would not have allowed her to leave if she had asked. So she ran away into the mountains and eventually joined the Alderan clan. I solved a second “problem” here, that of the mystery of the Alderan telepathic training and resulting strong “Keepers” even though they had been relegated to the role of outlaws and not included in the regular Tower training. By giving them a run-away Keeper, who could teach them, I explained their tradition.

I sent it in and got a nice rejection saying “This is a good story, but I can’t use it because I have something similar already.” I remember deciding I had lost the place to a story by Mercedes Lackey, which I felt wasn’t bad (I have no idea if this is true or not, and probably isn’t). I had heard of MZB’s terrible rejection letters, but this one was encouraging so I decided to try again for the next Darkover anthology. Instead, I received a flyer about the *Sword and Sorceress XII* anthology that had just been sold and was open for contributions.

Since my main goal was to see if I could sell a story, not necessarily a Darkover story, I decided to submit a story to this anthology as well. Unlike the Darkover anthologies, *Sword and Sorceress* includes all kinds of stories involving swordswomen and women magic users. As there had already been 11 other anthologies, Bradley was looking for unusual magic, among other things. Since I was heavily involved in Heian Japanese literature at the time, I had learned quite a bit about the Japanese ideas of fleeting moments of beauty and illusion. So when I thought about how to make my heroine different from earlier magic users, I decided to make her an illusionist. Then I had to find a story to put her in.

I have an idea book of phrases, short summaries of ideas or characters to someday use in a story. One of my more persistent ideas is the “impossible task to marry the princess” stories. I liked the idea of the impossible task being the presentation of a blue rose, since I knew there were some rather obsessed rose breeders actually trying to develop blue roses. I dislike the traditional “blue rose” story because the roses are never really blue. The princess just picks a prince she likes and says his roses are blue, when they are really white. This was cheating, I thought. If she could say they were blue, why not have them really become blue? So, my illusionist.

Then I started thinking about the rest of the story—the suitors the princess didn’t pick were executed. If she could declare any rose the blue rose, what did it say about her that she let so many suitors be executed before she found one she liked? She didn’t actually get to know any of the suitors, she just decided she liked them or not after a brief glimpse. Not a very nice person at all! I just couldn’t make her my heroine. Back to the drawing board. Thinking about this story more, I realized that more was going on than the basic story said. Why did all these men continue to show up with fake roses when they knew they would almost certainly be executed? Well, the princess was very beautiful, after all. But the men I know aren’t that stupid. Not one of them said he would chance being executed to see if the princess would choose him—maybe I just know very sensible men. And even if he was chosen, I didn’t think the princess would suddenly change her character. The first fight would have her husband beheaded. Maybe there was magic involved. Did the Princess bewitch the men so they couldn’t help themselves? Things were beginning to fall into place.

I had two illusionists, the Princess and my heroine, a blue rose that really was blue, evil magic—almost a story.



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I added the a fantasy Tibetan/Chinese setting, one illusionist masquerading as a suitor, and off I went. I wrote the story quite quickly, had my husband do a read-through for obvious errors (not a good idea as he has no idea of how fairy tales are supposed to work), ran the spell-checker through it and sent it off, basically as a first draft. I sent it in as soon as the flyer said reading would begin and then sat back to wait. I remember the final day for reading was May 14, and expected to hear about my story in two or three weeks.

On May 14, at about 4:00 p.m. my husband called me at work to say that a large envelope addressed to me in my handwriting had arrived. I said it was probably my ms being returned and tried not to be too disappointed. It was, after all, only the second story I had ever submitted for publication. John disagreed though, saying the envelope was too thin to contain my ms. I got really excited and told him to open it and let me know what was actually in it. He said he couldn't open my mail, it wasn't polite, probably illegal, etc. We spent five minutes on this issue (he loves to tease me about my writing), and only when I threatened to make him sleep on the loveseat for a week and never make him pilaf again, did he give in and agree to open the envelope. He must have held it right next to the phone, because I could hear him slowly (and I mean slowly!) rip it open and even more slowly pull out the papers inside. Then dead silence. I almost screamed at him to read the darn thing and then I heard him read "Dear Author..." It was late that evening that I finally read past those two words. I had sold a story!

Later I learned that my story must have been among the ones picked early and not held to see what else was received. At the time, I didn't care. I was so excited to have sold it. I didn't get any more work done that day (fortunately, I only work until 4:30 officially) and all my co-workers were excited too. A couple of days later, they threw me a party to celebrate (we're the "any excuse for a party" folks). We had cake, punch, balloons and a large banner that read "Congratulations Author" and even a dramatic reading of the beginning of the story! I still get excited remembering this.

Then the waiting began. These anthologies are sold about a year before publication, so I had a long time to

wait. I sort of knew when to expect it to be out, but it was hard waiting so long. Over a year later, on June 25 (my birthday) I had stopped in at Chicago's SF bookstore, The Stars Our Destination, before my writers group meeting, to get the new releases. I walked into the store and there it was! *Sword and Sorceress XII* was out! What a great birthday present. Another member of my writers group was in the store too and we danced around the store and shouted about it. I got an author's discount on the book – really exciting to actually be called an author by someone not in my immediate family! Everyone in the writers' group was really excited too. The only thing I didn't like about the book was the cover. Several earlier volumes had David Cherry covers and I would really have liked another one. Instead, the cover (by someone whose name I've forgotten) looks more like a horror title than fantasy. It has a really dark background with a pale girl with long white hair in a long white dress holding a scythe as tall as she is. Really vampirish, I think.

At the next sf con I attended, probably Windycon, I met other friends and told them about my story. Many of them demanded autographs, so we all went to Larry Smith's table in the Dealers Room and I autographed every copy he had and my friends bought them all. An autographing! I didn't buy enough copies for myself, though, so if any readers see any copies let me know. I've wanted to give a few to other friends and didn't have any. I did have one to give to Harry Turtledove when he was in Chicago (ISFiC Guest at Windycon XXII) and he came up to me the next day and said he really liked my story, just as I was talking to author/editor Kathleen Massie-Ferch about being in a future anthology she might do—what perfect timing!

Sword and Sorceress XII is also cataloged at the D'Angelo Law Library of the University of Chicago, with a complete contents listing, because our director wanted a copy for our faculty publications collection. As a librarian, I have "non-academic faculty" status and am eligible for the faculty collection. I venture to say that it is the most interesting book in the collection. Of course, it's competition is *Admiralty Law*, all 7 editions, and the intensely academic series on law and economics. But it's there, professionally cataloged and bound. How cool.



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I Wanted to Be a Millionaire

Rich Horton

This past year I had occasion to visit New York City for the first time ... no very big deal, to many people, I'm sure. Even to a confirmed suburbanite like me the step up from cities with which I am fairly familiar (St. Louis and Chicago) to New York doesn't seem that significant. And indeed, there would be little to tell except for the reason I went to New York: to tape an episode of the game show *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*.

We flew out on Monday morning, into Newark Airport. (All paid for by the show, except meals.) The flight was uneventful—I read Jack Vance's murder mystery *The Fox Valley Murders* and started in on Muriel Sparks's *The Bachelors*. I did feel rather sick—partly the headache I usually get from pressure changes—partly something worse (a headache/flu sort of thing) that bothered me to some small extent the whole time it was in New York. Once at the airport we were met by our driver, who took us to the Empire Hotel, across the street from Lincoln Center. Upon getting there we encountered one of the facets of New York life with which I was unfamiliar—constant tipping. We tipped the car driver \$5, which he seemed to find satisfactory, but the busboy at the door seemed offended to only get \$1. Eventually we decided that \$2 every time somebody breathed was what they expected. Naturally the hotel wasn't ready for us yet—so we had to put our bags in storage (cha-ching!)—only to get them out again in a couple of hours when the room was ready (cha-ching!).

We occupied ourselves walking around the area, then had lunch at a deli. I got a Reuben for \$9. It was a very generously sized sandwich, with tons of corned beef, but I was disappointed in the quality. Not enough sauerkraut or thousand island dressing. We wandered over to Central Park, the southwest entrance to which was only a couple of blocks from the hotel. We just walked a little way into the park, over to some softball fields, and we watched a couple of teams, apparently from local bars, playing a decidedly desultory game of softball. The style was unusual: the ball is 12 inches, like the ball normally used in St. Louis, but it was bound in something like cloth, more like the 16 inch balls generally used in Chicago. Only 9 players played in the field, unlike the 10 more usual in the Midwest. There seemed to be no rules on arch of a pitched ball, and the pitching was very inconsistent. Not fast, though. The quality of play was very low. After a while we left and went back to the hotel, finally getting a room.

Our room was on the 7th floor of the hotel. It was a tiny room—much smaller than I would regard a standard

hotel room to be—as much smaller, I suppose, as it was more expensive. I mentioned this to a producer the next day, and he laughed and said all the out-of-towners say that, but that to a New Yorker it was a big room—bigger than an average apartment, anyway (this with a little laugh). Looking out the window at the intersection of Broadway and 7th Avenue I was most struck by the colour yellow. At a guess, 90% of the cars driving on Manhattan streets (in that area, anyway) are taxis, and all New York taxis are bright yellow. As we later learned, all the legends about the way New York taxis are driven are also true—plenty of honkin, plenty of cursing, lots of close calls—though we saw no accidents.

I had to meet one of the Millionaire show producers at 6:30, to go over the Tuesday schedule and to get our per diem and some other stuff, including some nice Manhattan maps, and some papers to read and sign, and also to get approval for my wardrobe. They nixed the rather classy grey shirt Mary Ann had picked, because grey apparently doesn't work well on TV. We'd anticipated that possibility, and we had also brought a solid green shirt and a solid red shirt, both of which met with the producer's approval, along with a khaki pair of casual dress pants, and a black pair. There was a brief discussion of the logistics for the next day, and a chance to meet my fellow contestants. (Except for one poor woman who got stuck coming from California due to airplane difficulties—she didn't make it in until midnight, which can't have helped her the next day.) I found myself liking and rooting for the other contestants from the beginning—they seemed very nice folks, and the show does a pretty good job of promoting a certain togetherness. You really don't get a sense of competing against the other people.

Then we were free for the night. We really did very little but walk around and eat an expensive dinner. We did learn that North-South blocks on Manhattan are very short—the walk from our hotel at 63rd Street to Times Square at 42nd street was not nearly the 3 miles or so we had feared. East-West blocks, on the other hand, are huge. I was struck by how safe we felt—we were out in the big city past midnight, and I was never worried. I don't think I would feel the same in downtown St. Louis. The difference in New York is that it is relatively crowded, and relatively light, at all hours.

The next day was tape day. The ABC Studios are on 67th Street, right next to Central Park. We had a 9:30 shuttle van. The van let us out at a small side door. We were let in and followed a maze of stairs and corridors to



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a rather pleasant conference room. There we were introduced to a couple of assistant producers who were assigned to keep tabs on the whole group of contestants. In addition, there were slightly higher-ranked producers who were assigned, ideally, one to a contestant. In our case, the ratio was more like one producer for each two contestants—someone was sick, and a couple producers had left the show—stuff like that. "My" producer was named Jennifer (one is tempted to ask "What else could she have been named?"): she was (and I presume, is), rather pretty, painfully thin, and very pleasant. (You can occasionally see her (and some of the other producers) in the wings when a contestant is escorted off the stage.) A producer's job, with respect to each contestant, includes gathering a bunch of personal information, some of which (the more interesting stuff) will be put on cards to prompt Regis Philbin for neat things to talk about if you are so lucky as to get to the "hot seat". I mentioned a variety of things, none of which seem terribly fascinating to me (I live a very prosaic life). They seemed most interested in the trivia contests I play in with my wife and some friends from church. (These have become quite popular in St. Louis over the past few years. They are usually fundraising events for schools or churches. Typically, 10 questions are asked in each of 10 categories. A common winning score would be in the low 80s. My regular team has entered 8 contests and won 5, finished second 3 times. A typical win means you break even after paying the baby sitter—second means you get your entry fee back. We have also organized and conducted a couple of these contests for our own church—which took some convincing of the more conservative church members.) The other fact they were interested in was my attendance record at work—asked what sort of contests for money I had previously won I mentioned that I won a drawing for \$1500 at work one year, part of what they called a "Presenteeism" program: only people who hadn't taken a sick day in the previous 6 months were eligible. This didn't seem like much of an accomplishment to me, as I rarely take sick days (once going some 10 years in a row without one—and I'm not particularly unique at my job in this), but the Millionaire show producers found it fascinating. I don't know what to make of that, except to note that as I wrote above, they were short-handed that day. They showed next to no interest in my mention of my fondness for science fiction.

Both breakfast and lunch were provided by the show's production company. The former was just a continental breakfast thing in the conference room, the latter a cafeteria-style meal, not at all bad, in the studio building's cafeteria.

After the producers had extracted all the neat personal information they could from each of us, it was time for

rehearsal. The twenty of us (contestants plus companions) tramped through another maze of corridors, guarded by a couple of assistant producers. They were among other things particularly concerned that nobody had access to any further information sources which could compromise the show—they hustled us particularly quickly past the studio newsstand, as if the headlines of the New York Post might be the subject of one of the day's questions. The actual studio in which the shooting occurs is rather smaller than it appears on TV. It's quite cold, especially without the shooting lights on. The contestants were assigned seats in the ring around the "hot seat", just as for the real shooting. The companions sat directly behind us—for the real shooting they would sit some rows higher (I suppose to preclude the possibility of illicit help). The floor of the studio, on which the hot seat is perched, is made of glass (or perhaps some hard transparent plastic). It's a bit of an odd feeling standing on it—it's also rather slippery (particularly, claimed the women, if you are wearing heels).

The first order of business was some fastest-finger practice. For those who haven't seen the show, perhaps a brief explanation is in order. There are ten contestants. In order to get a chance to play for actual money (to sit in the "hot seat") you need to win a "Faster Finger" game. (There are typically 2 or three per show.) The game involves ranking four things in some order: a typical question would be "List these movies in the order of their first theatrical release, beginning with the earliest." A. Birth of a Nation. B. Casablanca. C. Star Wars D. Erin Brockovich. Though probably a bit harder, and with a cute thematic link.

I was surprised at how low-tech the fastest-finger setup is. There are six buttons, not four as one might assume. There is one button for each choice (A, B, C, D), plus a backspace button, in case you decide you made a mistake, and an "Enter" button which must be pushed to register your four selections. The buttons are large and a bit balky—you need to push them fairly hard to make sure your choice registers. That, plus the fifth ("Enter") button, mean that it takes a bit more time to answer the "fastest finger" question than many think. In addition, the timer starts as soon as the question is asked—the four answers pop up simultaneously on each contestant's screen, though Regis takes a few seconds to read all four. Typically, you need to have your answers in before Regis finishes reading—indeed, we were cautioned not to listen to Regis, as that would slow us down. The screen itself is a decent flat screen, but encased in brushed aluminum, with a unreliable looking cable (wrapped in electrical tape) connecting screen to keyboard. It looks like something my company's test-equipment lab might have thrown together in a day—in 1985.



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We were then asked several fastest finger questions, to give us a chance to get accustomed to the setup. The questions were mostly pretty easy—list these parts of a bird from head to toe, stuff like that. After everybody seemed to have the hang of it, we were all given a chance to sit in the hot seat, and answer several questions, try out the lifelines, etc. Regis wasn't there: the questions were asked by one of the main producers, or maybe even the director—not a lowly assistant, at any rate. She had some fun doing broad imitations of Regis. She also tried out some sample chit-chat possibilities from the card the producers had made up for Regis, with personal info about each of us. The questions themselves were actually fairly hard—for a simple reason, it turned out. They used questions from the British version of the show for this practice session. So we got stuff about British royalty like "Who was Princess Margaret's husband?" (I know: the photographer Lord Snowden, but still!), and stuff about British TV shows.

After this we got a long pep talk from Michael Davies, the Executive Producer. Davies is an interesting guy. He's British, looks to be about 35. He worked for Jeopardy!, then set up shop on his own, and invented a couple of successful UK game shows—besides Who Wants to Be A Millionaire? I think he did Whose Line is it Anyway? He's very energetic, and his talk was very upbeat and pretty funny. He told a few Regis stories, and a couple of (fairly acerbic) Alex Trebeck stories—there seems to be a certain rivalry between the two shows. He gave us quite a bit of advice—take your time, don't worry about wasting time in order to give the other contestants a chance. (Much of the deliberation ends up on the cutting room floor—they have a pretty good idea how many questions they want per show, so the only real way you can give your fellow contestants more chances is by missing questions, and you don't want to do that.) He talked up the 50/50 among the lifelines—it tends to be the least highly regarded among viewers because it doesn't ever give you a single answer—on the other hand, it always gives you the correct answer (it's only that it also gives you another choice).

There was also a brief talk by a lawyer, going over things like your right to appeal a wrong answer. They admitted that they had been caught in an error twice previously. They mentioned potential audience problems—on one occasion just a week or two prior to our show, an audience member had yelled out an answer while the contestant was deliberated. They rushed to the seat, ready to eject the person—only it turned out to be a mentally-handicapped man. They settled for urging his companion to keep him quiet. At any rate—the answer he yelled was wrong—the contestant had been thinking about giving the correct answer, but upon hearing the

audience member, he wavered, but fortunately decided to stick with his original choice. Or so they told us—at any rate, I am sure that the whole business was edited out of the telecast.

After finishing the rehearsal, which took an hour and a half or so, we had the cafeteria lunch. Then it was time for dress and makeup. By this time the producers had contacted all the "phone-a-friends" to make sure they were ready. (My phone-a-friends were my brothers Bill and Paul, my Mother (with Dad expected to be by the phone as well), Bill's father-in-law Bob Olson, and the editor of this 'zine, Mr. Silver.) I dressed in black pants with a red short-sleeved shirt - simple colors work best on TV. We had to empty our pockets of any possible informative material—such as wallets, even change. (I remember one question which asked "On which U. S. coin does the head face to the right?" (Answer: Penny), so change could be useful reference material.) They even confiscated my wife's purse. I had a brief scare because they had to verify my social security number, and I had forgotten my card. Fortunately, Missouri driver's licenses use the SSN as the ID number, and they were willing to accept that.

For men, the makeup process was very simple: just a little bit of pancake stuff to reduce the shine on our faces. The women took somewhat longer (and, I guess, the 19-year old kid, who had some acne they wanted to deal with). I was in and out in a couple of minutes, and we cooled our heels for a while, along with the holdover contestant from the previous night. Then it was nearly 4 o'clock, and down we went to the studio again, ready for the actual taping.

The companions were led to their seats in the audience, while we waited in a line behind the audience seats. From such a perspective the studio looks rather makeshift—bare cement floors—the backs of the seating all exposed like the backs of bleachers at a high-school football stadium. Finally Regis came in and walked down the line of contestants, shaking hands with each of us. He is a rather small man, and seemed affable enough in that brief time. He went up to the stage, and we filed into our seats.

One thing the TV audience never sees is the entertainment during breaks. There was a comedian, who warmed up the audience before the taping, and then during commercial breaks. He was reasonably amusing. He passed out t-shirts to audience members for various achievements—singing TV theme songs of his choice, or having the right birthday, or being cute and female.

There was one holdover contestant, who had already earned \$32,000. As I recall, he answered one more question correctly, then left. The next fastest finger question was "List these four artists according to date of



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birth." The four were two older artists—an old master and an impressionist, I believe, then two fairly contemporary artists: David Hockney and Frida Kahlo. I had never heard of Kahlo (though I read something about a movie being made about her a couple of weeks after the taping - natch!) so I guessed she might be the youngest. Wrong. The guy next to me won. He moved fairly rapidly through his questions, winning \$32,000 before getting the \$64,000 question wrong. It was "What is unusual about a certain mall in Saudi Arabia?", and the choices were "No Men", "No Women", "No Lights", and something else—"No Walls", maybe. I guessed easily enough that it would be "No Men"—the contestant tried asking the audience, which gave the wrong answer.

The next fastest finger asked us to list four fashion models according to date of birth—I don't remember the models, but it was easy to get the order correct. Only, I was much slower than the winner, a woman named Kati Knudsen from Seattle. Kati was (and still is, I assume) roughly my age, a few years younger, perhaps. She's a doctor, and her husband was with her, a tall, reserved, man named Ernie, an accountant (who looked like an accountant).

There was a fairly significant bit of controversy while Kati was in the hot seat. At about the \$8,000 question, she was asked "What is a budgy?". This would have been a £200 question, I'm guessing, on the English version of the show: a budgy is a budgerigar, a pet bird (actually an Australian parakeet) very popular over there, but all but unknown in the U.S. (or perhaps we just call them parakeets). I read enough English novels so that I knew the answer immediately, but evidently no one else besides Regis and (as we shall see) one audience member also knew. The choices were "Bird. Scooter. Love Seat. Car.", as I recall. Kati agonized for quite some time (most of which was edited out), seeming to lean towards "love seat", because that's kind of bulgy, and bulgy sounds like budgy. Then she decided to use her 50/50, and the choices remaining were "bird" and "scooter". After considerable further agitation, and asking Regis for help ("I'd help you," he said, "but I don't know what it is either!"), she settled on "scooter". "Is that your final answer?" asked Regis. "Noo!" came an anguished scream from the upper reaches of the audience. Shocked reaction. Kati said something like, "I guess I better change my mind", and answered "bird", which was correct. Cut to commercial, and some very stern words from the comedian to the audience, about how wrong such intervention was. All this controversy was edited out of the televised version.

Kati continued, having a bit of a problem with "What is the name of Xena's sidekick on the television show Xena, Warrior Princess?". The choices were "Lucy

Lawless", "Gabrielle", "Callisto", "Ioleus". Regis had enormous difficulty with the pronunciation (the producers had emphasized that Regis often can't pronounce things properly, and they will come out (without the cameras running) and give you the correct pronunciation if you ask): he pronounced "Xena" "Xeña" once, correctly the other time, pronounced "Gabrielle" "Gabriela", and he simply couldn't get "Ioleus". At any rate, Kati didn't know, but she phoned a friend, and the friend blurted out the answer before she finished reading the question. That's the kind of phone-a-friend help you need!

Kati got up to about \$64,000, as I recall, before the show ended. Alas, no time in the hot seat for me! At the end, Regis gave her a bit of a hard time (in a kind way) about her difficulties with the budgy question—she said "But you didn't know the answer either!", and he replied, "Actually, for that question, I did know the answer. But I couldn't tell you that!"

There was a bit more, rather wrenching, drama in store for Kati, however. On the next show she successfully answered the \$125,000 and \$250,000 question. The \$500,000 question was "Which nation is the most recent one to be admitted to the UN?". The four choices included two obviously wrong answers, and two others, Pacific Island nations both, that I would have had no chance at distinguishing. (Tonga and one other one—my guess was the other one, but Tonga turned out to be correct—obSF: Tonga is the home of the Queen of Sol in Wil McCarthy's *The Collapsium*.) Kati was agonizing between the same two—at last she announced "Women always seem to wimp out. I want to be the first woman to get to a million: I'm going to take a guess!" She guessed wrong, and she just look shattered when she left the chair, really distressed. I was quite upset myself—I was rooting for her. Some of my friends, having heard the story of the budgy question, said words to the effect "She got what she deserved!", but I didn't feel that way at all. As I said, we really felt a certain camaraderie with the other contestants, and I was hoping she'd win a lot of money. That said, there was a certain amount of grumbling among the other contestants to the effect that we ought to have got some compensation for our lost chance at another fastest finger: and indeed I think it would have been reasonable for them to allow us to be scheduled for another taping without going through the phone lines again.

One aspect of the show we weren't privy to was the technical details of editing and production. It seems to me that a lot of editing is done real-time, though—the taping took about two hours to fit the one hour time slot, and they knew just when to end the show. I'm pretty sure they like to guarantee at least two contestants from each group of ten. After the taping was over, they did take the



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time to retake one or two shots: telling Regis to place his arms just so, so that they could splice the retake in.

We were a bit tired after the taping, but it seemed a shame to waste a night in New York City. We debated seeing the reissued and recut Coen Brothers film “Blood Simple,” which is a favorite of mine and of Mary Ann’s as well, but decided that too could wait until the movie came to St. Louis. Having missed Rockefeller Center the day before, we decided to make sure we saw it this night, and we recalibrated our maps accordingly. This time we found it. Mary Ann wanted to see the ice rink, but of course it’s not operative in July. (She reminds me that she KNEW THAT.) The location is occupied by outdoor seating for a place called the Rink Deli. However we did see the flower sculptures, and some of the aggressively whimsical cow sculptures that have been placed all around Manhattan. St. Patrick’s Cathedral is not too far away from Rockefeller Center, so we visited that as well. It’s a very impressive huge church. Then back to the hotel, with stops at the odd little shop on the way, and a bit of minor-celebrity-watching, as Mary Ann saw some guy she recognized walking out of the Fox News building. (Some host of one of their daytime political talk shows, or something like that.)

Wednesday, then, was the day reserved for busy sightseeing. Our plane didn’t leave until 7:30 PM or so, and we had to be at the hotel by 5:30 to meet our car. We woke up and packed, and took our luggage down to the lobby, leaving it in hock until time to leave. (Thus setting ourselves up for about four more tips, but what the heck.) Then we asked the guy at the desk what was the best way to deal with subways, and he recommended something called a Metrocard, or words to that effect. For \$4, you can go anywhere you want on subways and buses, all day long, until I think 3 AM the next morning. Such a deal! (I say with complete sincerity: I was very impressed by the public transportation.)

We walked out of the hotel around the corner to a little deli, and had breakfast. We met Kati Knudsen and her husband at the deli, getting ready for their carryover show taping. We chatted a bit, ate a light breakfast, met another contestant on the way out ... then down into the subways. I was a bit nervous about using this unfamiliar form of transportation, but it is actually very easy, very convenient. The only thing I messed up was not figuring out the difference between Expresses and Locals. Thus we ended up taking a Local in the morning when an Express would have been best, and taking an Express later in the day when we wanted to stop at a Local stop. Oh well, no real harm was done.

I suppose it would be tedious to detail too much of our day of sightseeing. The Statue of Liberty was the main goal, so we took the subway to Battery Park on the southern tip of Manhattan. At the park we bought ferry tickets, and soon we were on our way to the Statue. We were far too late to go all the way up to the top of the Statue, but we did wait about 45 minutes to go up to the balcony on top of the pedestal. It’s all worth seeing, nice to see the Statue itself, the presentations about how it was made, the alternate designs, etc. The balcony is very narrow, surprisingly so, and hence crowded. The view of New York Harbor is kind of neat, too. On the way back we bypassed Ellis Island, as we wanted to see other things and time was pressing.

Our next goal was the Empire State Building. Here I miscalculated, and we got on an Express subway. We blew right by the stop nearest the Empire State Building, and stopped at Grand Central Station. We wandered around Grand Central a bit, which is pretty cool really, and then decided to walk south a few blocks to where we thought the Empire State Building was. We did gawk at the Chrysler Building, which is pretty cool, and much shinier than I had any idea.

It was a bit of a hike down to where we thought the Empire State Building was. And when we got there, we couldn’t see any sign of it. We looked around us: no sign at all. You wouldn’t think you could miss a building that big, but we did! It turns out we were one east-west block to the east of it. Still. Walking back to Grand Central we stopped at a little bar and had lunch. Partly just to get into air-conditioning: it was finally hot. (I haven’t mentioned the weather: it was quite remarkably nice for New York in July: cool and clear. Gorgeous, really.) At Grand Central we hopped on the subway shuttle over to Times Square. It was getting a bit late, and we just did a little shopping before heading back to the hotel.

Our car was waiting. We got our luggage out of hock and loaded up. On the way there we noticed all kinds of horrible looking traffic coming back the other way. The driver was getting pretty worried about his drive back. We finally realized that Gore (or somebody, but I think it was Gore, unless it was Hillary) was in town, and they had roadblocks and stuff all around Newark Airport. Luckily, the route the driver took into the airport was fine: but it looked like he’d have a headache getting back.

Everything went quite smoothly at the airport. The flight home was nice: the plane was not very full at all. It was nice getting back in our beds late that night, though.



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Dumpster Diving and Conspiracy Theory

by Michael A. Andaluz

Well, another Labor Day has gone by and what else have we to look forward to, but an extra day to get our garbage together?

For the whole of this past Monday, as every year, Americans all around me saluted the average worker. Here in Pontiac, Michigan, what other public servant can we honor more than the lowly sanitation worker, i.e. trash pickup, who chooses to honor his day of honor by not picking up the trash until Friday, where in Pontiac it happens to be Thursday (whenever we're not honoring somebody)?

I digress. Today, I found myself with a quandary. A load of old monitors and computer equipment had accumulated in my basement over the past few years, and this week was to be THE week I would throw them, and all my hopes of becoming a monitor repairman, to the wind – more accurately the curb. But gads, the pickup will be delayed for a day! What ever should I do? I can't put this off, for if I do, what would stop me from putting it off for the week? When would it end? I had to act. I put the stuff outside.

While hauling the first of six thirteen-inch monitors to the curb, however, I had an idea: why not have fun? So I hatched a plan. Only the week before, my trash pickup was an eventful one. You see, on Thursday morning, the garbage trucks made their circuit around our fair Indian Village (early, this time) and picked up everyone's trash. Except mine.

I was heartbroken. I'd bundled the longish stuff, boxed the heavy stuff in comfortably small boxes, and tended carefully to the broken bits of glass which could maim the unprotected hand. Everything was in readiness for the Great Taking Away by nightfall Wednesday night, and I'd sat on the porch as the sun set, watching the hordes of raiding dumpster divers scour the village for useful trash, a seemingly never-ending torrent flowing gypsy-caravan-like from neighboring Waterford - in their rusty-trusty pickups and vans that serve no other purpose than to cart Pontiac trash perhaps to the Dixie Land Flea Market up the road, to be

sold to unknowing tourists as *objets d'art*, or some such. Don't laugh. It works. You can see the path they have worn up Telegraph Road with their mud-soaked (Waterford, remember. No dirt drives for us city folk) tires. Roads to Rome were never so heavily trod. But again, I digress. That following morning, the Visigoths of Pontiac Sanitation had rejected me. The agent of their doings this time was a hefty young man who could not bend beyond a thirty degree angle without rupturing his aorta, I suppose, because he bent to twenty-nine, just far

enough to examine my lovingly applied bindings to the longish stuff with the tips of his fingers. He stood, and toed the little boxes of heavy stuff. With a cautious look around, he then hopped into his truck and left it all, heading up the street to lavish his limited talents upon my next door neighbor's refuse. No polite little memo, stating that my trash was not up to their standard. No nothing. Just a puddle of hydraulic oil and a spritz of effluent from somewhere within the hulking white aluminum box on the back of his truck.

I was aghast. I then made up my mind to give him what-fer in the only way I knew how - I resolved to cover the curb the next week with everything I thought worthy of disposal. Six old disused VGA monitors, Old Sun Server, two line printers, assorted and sundry trash, a big ol' bag of used kitty litter, the works. Nothing over fifty pounds, (lucky for him, for I have a complete Turbo-Hydramatic 4T60-E transaxle somewhere around here, at two hundred pounds) and all bundled according to Pontiac Sanitation regulation. If he ignored the lot this time, I'd document it and call the department. Ha!

But they got me - this week was Labor Day. I had to wait an extra day. For that day, I stared at the meticulously piled weaponry in the basement, surrounded by cats who thought me quite mad, and seethed. Today, as I hefted that first monitor to the curb, however, I thought to enjoy myself in my madness. You see, Waterford has a different pickup schedule, and as such there is every chance that the wandering hordes of dumpster divers therefrom might ignore that civic holiday which you Americans so enjoy and boast, and come in their customary swarms a day early. Let them come! I have everything you could want! But let me make a few preparations.

Waterford, if not all of Michigan, is the capital state of conspiracy theory. Just Ask Casey MK ULTRA Brennan, or maybe Terry Nichols. The list is long. But what, perhaps, would happen if you seed the heart of the gray market - the trade in used, worthless computer equipment – with a little spicy stuff? You could spread paranoia throughout the system - bring down the ranks! Chaos would reign! The government would falter, then crumble, and city services would be forthwith revolutionized.

So, in my own private and twisted way, I was going to get a bit of revenge. It would take time, but this first step would be important. I started up my trusty laptop and printed up a few address labels. (Not the ones for mailing out TANSTAAFL, mind you - that's paid for by the Association. I have a few ratty, yellowing old ones that were perfect for what I had in mind.) On each, was the



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message: OFFICIAL USE ONLY - CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY LIVE FEED MONITOR. I merged it with a short list of current hotspots: Belfast. Jerusalem. East Timor. Oklahoma City. Bogota. A couple more. Then I printed the labels and affixed one to each of my trashed monitors. One of them had been discovered, inspected and duly sprayed by my one obsessively possessive cat. Tough. Out they go. The printers were next. The big one got this: TO CENSORS ONLY-CLASSIFIED OUPUT.

Upon the little dot-matrix unit, I emblazoned DECLASSIFIED- PRESS RELEASES.

I wrapped the box of 286 and 386 motherboards and tape drives with a piece of yellow barrier tape, which read POLICE LINE- DO NOT CROSS (never mind where I got it) and stapled a card to the box that read DECLASSIFIED.

I am now deciding what to label the old Sun Server carcass. After standing back to marvel at my little Data Henge monument, I scampered inside to write this.

Pontiac - nay, Michigan, is a place of seasons. On any given weekend, the signs of the schedule of nature assail the senses like the pit bull next door heading for the imaginary Big Mac wedged somewhere in your hand when you walk by his house. Last month was Muskrat Suicide Month. The month before that, skunks. And raccoons before that, and so on up the food chain. Rutting, rodents, and road trips do not go well hand in hand.

City dwellers are no different. No, they don't go sex-mad and throw themselves in front of speeding Ford Expeditions on a schedule, but their weekly cycles in the wilds of Pontiac's Northwest side are no less predictable, and we don't so much participate ourselves - as pragmatic, resourceful individuals - as we do look in awe and wonderment on our Thursday morning walks. Late winter gives us curbs lined with broken and naively abandoned snowblowers and saucer sleds that went their own way with or without their young knights in moon boots and mittens. Early spring yields the most old child-sized bed frames, and bicycles that could not be resuscitated from their six-month comas in the garage.

Midsummer is Vacuum Cleaner season.

Before autumn's embrace, we are graced with a legion of lawn mowers, air conditioners, weed whackers, box

fans and everything that fell victim to the power surges we find so common on the grid during the severe thunderstorms that are so common here in the summer. Following these trends, I'm certain, are the Northern Barbarians from Waterford, in caravans of smoke-spewing Plymouth Voyagers, or Ram Vans with tires of four separate and distinct sizes, and those little sedans otherwise filled to the brim with election flyers, newspapers, or refuse from other people's curbs. (Winter, of course, brings snows that makes a veritable No-Drive Zone of our street, I don't know about you.)

But now, as autumn approaches, I make my move. If there indeed is a synchronicity in the dumpster diving community, I shall find it out. I will rise from my keyboard any minute and see which of the hotspots has been taken first, and monitor the fun with glee all day and into the night - when the serious diving starts. To the Visigoths - the spoils.

Next week, I plan on setting out all the hard drives, preloaded meticulously with easily retrieved nuggets of nonsense specially tailored by (I daresay) a master of diversionary prose. Next ... I do have a few old costume accoutrements... gloves, sunglasses, briefcases. An old air drill that looks like a sawn-off AK-47 (if you squint). Maybe a lead pipe wrapped in with the longish stuff, spritzed with a dash of the cherry red paint I use to touch up the Jeep.

Thus the seeds will be sown. I hear them revving up their V7-out-of-8 engines already, set to sweep through town, pillaging and scouring Indian Village before our government can react by sending out the Visigoths - spinally challenged as they may be, in their white, hydraulic oil and effluent leaking chariots of olfactory fire.

The circle of life shall spin, and by October scores of people - conspiracy voyeurs, techno-wannabes, and spliff-sucking dropouts in need of an LARPG with just that much more realism - will be rifling through my trash, instead of leaving it on the curb unloved. Let them come. At least my junk will get removed.

And as a bonus, maybe you'll see one of those ominously labeled monitors at Dixie Land this Sunday and have a little, mad laugh with me.



ARGENTUS



We Must Do Something, But Does It Matter If It's the Right Thing To Do?

by Steven H Silver

I was putting the finishing touches on this issue of *Argentus* today, September 11, 2001, when word of catastrophe began filtering in from the East Coast. As everyone knows, today is a day which will live in infamy as surely as December 7 or April 19.

As I'm writing this, I've just returned to my desk from a pair of hotel meetings in Rosemont, IL, next to O'Hare. The roads leading to and from the airport were eerily empty. The only other time I saw them that empty was when the road had been cleared for Vice President Gore's caravan into the city of Chicago. They were a far cry from the scene which awaited me at the first hotel.

The Holiday Inn in Rosemont has several television monitors scattered around in the snack bar and the halls. All, of course, were tuned to news reports which were saying little of substance and showing the horrific pictures from New York and Virginia. Businessmen and conference attendees were ignoring their scheduled sessions to stare at the screen and try to learn what was happening while the media was transferring from "A catastrophe has happened and this is what it is" mode to "A catastrophe has happened and we don't have any more news" mode.

At the front desk, there were long lines as hotel guests were dealing with the newfound awareness that either their flights out had been cancelled or their flight to Boston, or Minneapolis, or Denver, or wherever had left them stranded in Chicago when it put into the nearest airport.

Two hours later, with my meetings finished, I got into the car to drive back to my office. I was a little surprised by what I heard on the radio. In Chicago, the Sears Tower and Hancock Buildings were being evacuated. I could understand that. In addition, most of downtown had shut down with trains evacuating people to their homes as quickly as they could be filled. Many suburban malls were closing as were universities and businesses. Government offices were closing and all police were being ordered into the streets. The only airplanes flying were government planes.

While I found some of these precautions sensible, notably the flight interdict, closing tall and otherwise high-profile buildings. Others struck me as panic, exactly the goal the terrorists (at this point unknown, and possibly unknowable) were striving for.

Perhaps one of the stranger things was George Bush announcing that "the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts." While this is exactly the sort of thing one would expect to hear from the President of the US (if not as poetic as "a day that will live in infamy," it strikes me that this type of activity is exactly the sort of thing Bush has been warning the Israelis not to do when terrorists strike in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem.

In the coming days and weeks, the government will announce who they believe perpetrated this atrocity and will carry out reprisals. Unfortunately, I have a feeling it will just be the bogeyman of the day. At this time, it seems likely that blame will fall on Osama bin Laden. A few years ago, Saddam Hussein would have been the most likely culprit. Before him, Ayatollah Khomeini or Moammar Qaddafi. It may well be that Osama bin Laden is behind today's attack, but given the long string of antagonists the United States has had, perhaps it would be more appropriate to do a root cause analysis to determine if there were something the United States could do to understand their concerns better and, perhaps, work with them so they no longer see the US as the "Great Satan." Unfortunately, this requires long-term vision, something which the US is not particularly good at.

Don't get what I'm saying wrong. The plane crashes in New York, Arlington, Somerset county and other collateral attacks were heinous crimes. The United States, however, has never had to learn how to deal with terrorism as other countries (the UK or Israel for example) have had to learn. Therefore, in this case the country reacted beyond what was necessary.

If we overreact by closing more buildings and institutions than are necessary, we help the terrorists achieve their purpose of disrupting our culture and nation.



ARGENTUS



Do We Know the Way to ConJosé?

Tom Whitmore

What do I want ConJosé to be? I want it to be a gathering of our tribe, a chance for people with a lot of different interests to come together and play together. Fandom is a diverse group - it's a lot larger than a village these days, more like a small city, where some of the folks over in Filk Valley don't like gamers except for their friend Fred who isn't really like the other gamers; where the book collectors seldom talk to the art collectors; where the fan-fund-friendly sometimes feel like they don't fit in. (By the way, feel free to put the groups mentioned above in any of the noun-slots in those sentences - they were chosen for assonance, not for literal attribution!) ConJosé, with luck and some planning, will be a city-wide festival, where all the people contribute to a five-day chance for everyone to meet everyone else who wants to be part of our city. Some people will stick pretty close to their own group; some will talk to a few people they don't know; and some will immerse themselves completely in our party, forgetting to sleep or eat as they do so.

For me, the Worldcon is several different things, on different levels. Here are a few: I cherish the fact that we make this event - nobody makes it for us and sells it to us. Everyone, on every level, working on the con is a volunteer. There are hundreds of different reasons why people volunteer, and trying to manage the reasons is a fruitless task - but the fact that they volunteer, follow through and make the event happen at a fraction of the cost of mundane conventions is amazing. It's a chance to see and work with old friends, people I grew up with. While rummaging through some papers while I'm moving, I found a cartoon that Bjo Trimble, one of our fan guests of honor, drew for me in 1969 at the Star Trek Memorial Luncheon (it's on the back of the menu). Neither of us imagined, I'm sure, that we'd be where we are today when that cartoon was drawn; the world has changed considerably, but we have continuity. A good friend describes convention friendships as "five days wide and thirty years deep". I love thinking of them that way. This time, it's a chance for me to help my friends have a

great time and not burn themselves out. A Worldcon chair has no real power - volunteers can walk away at any time. What I get to do is keep people focused on our vision: a convention where we respect each other; where we share information freely; where we end up moderately in the black; where we promote SF, fantasy, and fandom.

What will ConJosé be? It'll be exactly what we make it. We all have the chance to affect the con. We bring our passion, our will, our belief in the joy of talking and listening to others about the literature, films, games, art, and worldview that expands how we deal with others rather than contracts it. The committee does its best to help conversations grow out of that passion. I'll be happy if nobody notices that the committee is there, for the most part - that will mean that we've done everything right and there's nothing anyone wants to complain about. We all know how likely that is in fandom, though!

We're going to make mistakes - I hope that we'll be big enough to recognize them when they happen, and correct them as quickly as possible. Some people will see some of our active decisions as mistakes, rather than choices - again, we should be big enough to explain our reasons, and continue on our course, rather than reacting negatively to their feedback. Overall, I intend to do my best to listen to all parties, respect their viewpoints, and make the best choice I can for the entire convention. When ConFrancisco developed its mission, goals, and vision statements, we set up a powerful mechanism to help us make hard decisions. I changed my mind several times as we processed ideas using our agreed-upon criteria. We're trying to do the same thing with ConJosé - develop explicit standards that we can use when faced with difficult choices. And we will be faced with such choices. We hope that the attendees and committee like the decisions we make, that all come to our convention and have a great time, and that all feel that we've been willing to listen even when we end up disagreeing. It'll be an interesting job to get there.





ARGENTUS



The Five Throated Voice of Ghu,

or, How Mike Pins and I saw the relics of the Space Age
(Reflections on life and the Kennedy Space Center, circa December 2000
Erik V. Olson

It was Tom Whitmore's fault. Let's get that straight from the start. It is Friday, December 1st, 2000, about noon, Eastern Standard Time, and I find myself driving a rental car, loaded with a full complement of fen¹, into the "Discovery-2" section of the Visitors' Complex² of the Kennedy Space Center.

We were running later than we should. This is a theme that will play throughout the weekend, might as well introduce it now. I woke up on time, tiptoeing by Tom Whitmore (who's fault this all is, mind you.) and staggered off to the consuite, in hope of finding coffee.

The consuite isn't quite open yet. I putter about, helping the sleepy soul who's job it is to open the consuite, and solve the coffee problem by starting the coffee pot. Gradually, the coffee brews, fen wake up and by ten o'clock that morning, we are finally all accounted for, and after a final, futile hunt for Mike's sunglasses, we're off to Merritt Island, land of giants.³

In case you haven't been there, Florida is big, flat, and lush – even in the dead of "winter". I use scare quotes, since to this Chicago born soul, calling anything "winter" that involves the use of the words "High: 75° Fahrenheit" does not compute. In fact, this particular day was an very beautiful one, warm but not hot, no humidity, and a blue

¹ Along with the aforementioned-in-the-title Mike Pins, the car featured Tammy Coxen, Elspeth Kovar, a couple of sodas, two digital camera, a Minolta 600si SLR, with lenses and flash, and a Yashica T-4 point-and-shoot film camera. Most of these were my fault, except for one of the digital cameras, which was Mike's and one of the sodas, which was Elspeth's.

² It is, too. Complex, that is. It is one of those places, like The University of (your state) Hospital Medical Center, that has built up over time, had various structures remodeled, replaced and repainted, and new ones added, so you end up with what can only be described as a rococo layout. At a certain point, you leap beyond rococo into the realm of continuous construction. People argue where the orbital tower might be built, I'm convinced that it will be built when the Washington University School of Medicine decides that they need yet another new wing, and having consumed most of eastern Missouri and southern Illinois, starts building up in a **serious** manner – provided Northwestern or UMass doesn't get to orbit first.

³ Of course, we made it four blocks before Mike made us stop. He ran in to buy a new pair of sunglasses, and then extolled the virtues of these particular sunglasses for the next half hour. We would have gaffer-taped him to the top of the car, but we didn't have gaffer tape, and duct tape would have damaged the rental. Mike's mostly gotten over it, having reduced the "the lenses are optically correct" statement down to only once per convention.

sky of such intensity that photographers weep when it vaults above.⁴ It was almost as if the shuttle had flown by and dragged all the humidity away with it.⁵

I haven't explained how it was Tom's fault. I should now.

So we arrive at the visitors gate of the Kennedy Space Center Visitors complex, which, to be honest, is very Disney-like – that is, it is designed to quickly extract your money, and get you inside. The line are thankfully short, but it turns out we've missed the tours, since we didn't get there in time, and the area around the launch complex that flings the shuttle into the sky is closed, mainly because it had just flung a shuttle into the sky the night before, and they were still cleaning up. Fortunately, KSC is a big place, and there's more than enough to do, even when half the place is closed down from lighting the world's biggest reusable firework.

So, let's set the scene as we walk in. As you approach, there's the mandatory-for-a-government-institution flagstand, with a twist. Atop the mast flies the Stars and Stripes, as usual, but underneath flies a white flag with the "Endeavor" logo on it. A quick moment of confusion, and all is clear – they honor Endeavor while she's out of port. Forward, past the flagstand, the ranks of ticket booths, covered with solar panel like structures, actually serving as sunshades, with a couple of "working in orbit" posed astronaut statues for local color. Behind, a lake of asphalt. To our left, the giant circle they use to send both tour and transport buses out to the far flung wilds of Merritt

⁴ Briefly. Then, of course, they grab their cameras. When Chicago had a day like this, the Tuesday following Chicon 2000, I saw five photographers, all with medium format or larger cameras, on the four block walk from the Hyatt Regency Chicago to the Art Institute. I was very much regretting not having mine on me.

⁵ Well, maybe it had. STS-96 had launched at 10:00PM the night before, in an almost perfect countdown, carrying a connecting module to the International Space Station. Most reports of this nature would include a long description of the launch. Short version. The sky went blue. The sky went gold. An enormous streak of flame lept skyward, into orbit. Special bonus – a meteorite streaking through the sky. More complicated descriptions wouldn't describe the launch any better, so I'm not trying. I recommend that you go see a launch, better yet, go see both a day and night shuttle launch. Free tip – make sure that if you watch the launch from the beach, you pick the right beach, unless you think watching *Endeavor* leaping skyward over the Hilton Cocoa Beach is more awe-inspiring. I digress, but that's why this is a footnote. I digress often, thus, lots of footnotes. You should be thankful that this particular word processor doesn't let me do footnotes in footnotes.



Island.⁶ Finally, to our right, stands two rockets, and you finally realize this is a place where great things were done.

“Hey Erik!” breaks my reverie, echoing from two directions. From the north, it’s Mike, yelling to get over here and pay admission, from the south, Geri Sullivan waves hello, with Kim Campbell in tow.⁷ They are here for the same reasons we are – it’s a big place with rockets, and the con doesn’t start until that evening.⁸

So, we get in, gawk at the hallway, and decide to hit the far-flung portions of the area first, then work our way back towards the gate. We head towards the bus area, clamber aboard, and the bus heads to the “Apollo/Saturn V Center,” home of one of the three remaining Saturn V booster – the largest, loudest, most powerful craft that humanity has ever built.

The bus ride takes about 20 minutes. We see an alligator in a swamp next to the road, thus firmly establishing the fact that we are in Florida. The driver points out interesting things, like the fact that each stripe of the flag painted on the Vehicle Assembly Building is as wide as a

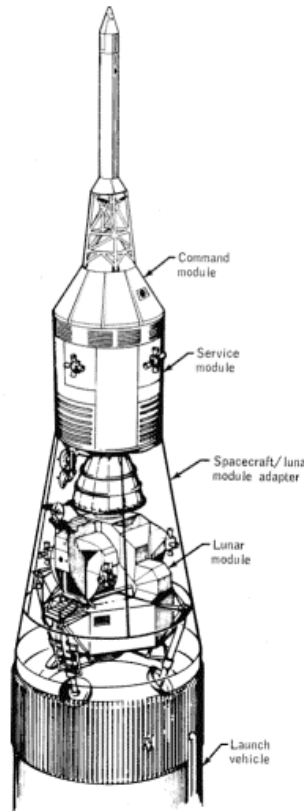
highway lane, and that the VAB is the world’s tallest one-story building.⁹

The VAB is an amazing place – but not because of the fact that it’s a big building. I’ve seen those. It isn’t that tall. It isn’t that wide. Next to One World Trade or Sears Tower, it’s a piker. But those buildings don’t have 450 foot doors, and didn’t build the five throated voice of Ghu. They are just buildings. This thing, looming over the Florida swamplands? This place is the birthplace of gods.

It is December 21st, 1968, 1:48am, Eastern Standard Time, and there are forty or so very **very** competent people sitting on the edge of their seats in the Launch Control Center, Launch Complex 39, Kennedy Space Center. Three and some odd miles away, at launch pad LC-39A, stands SA-503, the third Saturn V. This time, it’s for real. The name on the insignia hanging in the LCC is Apollo 8, and there are three on top of SA-503 that have names as well.

The Saturn V, this great striding colossus, hasn’t yet proven itself. SA-501 flew a mockup into earth orbit, splashing down 18 hours later into the Pacific ocean on a trajectory that probably would have killed the crew, and fired her engines for less than a fourth of the time needed for her real purpose.¹⁰ SA-502 suffered severe vibration, two of the second stage engines failed during boost, and after third stage shutdown, the

unmanned Apollo 6 CSM found itself in a 161km by 320km elliptical orbit, rather than the 160km circular orbit that it should have been in. When Mission Control tried to relight the SIV-B¹¹ for Trans Lunar Injection, it



⁶ I’ve mentioned that KSC is big. When you measure safe distances in terms of miles, you need buses to get you from point A to B. Kennedy Space Center looks to cover about 25 square miles, when you add in Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, where most of the unmanned rocket launches happen, you are close to 40 square miles. Considering this is an order-of-magnitude size comparable to Chicago, IL or New York, NY, you see why they have buses. Comfortable ones, too.

⁷ You could almost use this as a test for fannishness. The two answers I got to the question “You want to check out the big rockets?” were “Yeah!” and “Already did.” Anyone who could say no to that is probably the same kind of person who doesn’t loc. This hint brought to you by the Smith Association for Rabid Fanac – “Pub your ish, or the Spider gets it.” It’s Steven’s first ish ever, please loc generously. Continuing in the fanac vein, We Also ~~Heard From~~ saw Michael Nelson heading out on one of the tour buses, and Sharon Sbarsky with Seth Breidbart in the front of one of the souvenir shops. This may set a mark for a ‘zine – Argentus may be the first fanzine to whaf before loccing, which probably is illegal in South Carolina.

⁸ Well, that’s not quite true. In fact, there was one panel, titled “So, you have to have the Buffy panel,” about how to deal with the program items you’ve done a thousand times before, but you have to have them, or the membership gripes. Twenty years ago, this would have been “So, you have to have the Star Trek panel.” In actuality, this was probably a good panel, but when compared to really big rockets, it lost. Badly.

⁹ This is hard to verify. The main portion of the VAB is divided into four High Bays, and four Low Bays. I haven’t decided if this makes the VAB a two story building, or a one story building with an unusually large and well furnished basement.

¹⁰ SA-501, more commonly known as Apollo 4, was really flown to test the heat shield on the Block II Command Module, and to prove that the Saturn V’s staggering thrust wouldn’t end up destroying itself. This meant that SA-501, the first of these great beasts, passed her tests. But this one was easy. SA-502 was only judged a success by the barest criteria – she went up, parts came back.

¹¹ The Saturn rockets went through many design changes as they progressed, leaving some strange nomenclatures. There were three first stage designs – the S-I was used on the Saturn I, the S-IB was used on the Saturn I-B, and the S-IC on the Saturn V. At one time, there were four planned stages. S-III was deleted, but work had progressed far enough that when S-III went away, it was too much trouble to rename, so the Saturn IB that proved that Apollo CSM flew with the S-IB first stage, and the S-IVB second stage, and the Saturn V flew with a S-IC first stage, a S-II second stage, and the same S-IVB as the third stage.



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failed to start. The CSM was recovered, 90km off track – and, once again, it was judged that the crew probably wouldn't have survived re-entry. These were only the latest problems. The S-IVB originally built for SA-503 exploded during a test. And every person in the room remembered that AS-204, during a routine test at LC34, caught fire, and incinerated Gus Grissom, Ed White, and Roger Chaffee.¹²

The clock is at T-3 minutes, and counting. Three men sit five hundred feet in the air, and the next closest human being is over three miles away. Three million kilograms of propellant—kerosene, liquid hydrogen, liquid oxygen—have been loaded, and now, nitrogen flows in, pumps heave, and the tanks start to pressurize. The Saturn V groans, yawns, and starts to shed the frosty blanket that formed as the cryogenic tanks aboard condensed the seaside humidity from the air, then froze that humidity into great sheets of ice.

Two minutes, and the lights on the main status board continue to light. First to announce full pressure is the third stage – the smallest. Soon, the second stage comes to full pressure, finally, twenty seconds later, the massive first stage is ready for launch. More time, more lights. The computer on board announces that it is ready. The range officer shows a clear range. Communications are up. The auxiliary power units come to full power, and the power umbilical peel away.

Thirty seconds, and the computer in Firing Room 3 rapidly sends signals, starting the flow of fuel into the five F-1 engines, that, together, will burn an Olympic size swimming pool worth of fuel and oxidizer every two seconds. 2500 feet away, a valve opens in a giant water tank on the edge of the pad, and three hundred thousand gallons of water begin to pour under the five throats – not to protect the concrete and fire bricked pad from the intense fire about to be unleashed, but, instead, to dampen the mighty roar of the five throated voice of Ghu – a roar that would, otherwise, rebound off the pad and destroy the rocket before she could complete first 150 feet of her two hundred twenty five thousand mile journey.

Ten seconds, nine, eight – and they light – five gouts of flame, thousands of gallons of kerosene and liquid oxygen flash first into a bright yellow, then a ghostly blue flame. The flame roars downward, building as the main pumps come to speed – six, five – and “COMMIT” lights on the main status board – there's no way, at this point, to stop her without destroying her and all around. Four,

three, the status board shows five good engines, two – all engines at full thrust, one, zero – four clamps spit, four final connections peel away, and AS-504 climbs away, inch by inch, yard by yard, until...

...The lights come on in the Apollo Saturn Center Theatre, where the consoles that sat in Firing Room 3 have been set up, with the best that modern theatre tech has to offer, to show you what it was like that day when the first Saturn V flew to the moon. They didn't land there, of course, but they flew around the moon.

It's a setup, of course. You get off the bus, and they herd you and your bus mates into this dark room, where they show a 6 minute presentation on the buildup to Apollo 8. Then, The Door Opens, and you walk into a mock up of Firing Room 3, with the real consoles, and the status boards, and the clocks, all sitting there, gathering dust. Then, the docent walks out the side door, the clocks spin back, and everything lights up. They run the count. The floor shakes. Then, the door on the other side of the room opens, and the whole scene resets to it's sleepy façade. Amazing theatre. How can you top that?

Why, easy. The beast itself, lying on it side. It's huge. The word huge was coined just to describe this. For thrills, if you visit, go to the Rocket Park first, where there are only moderately big things – moderately big thing that did moderately great things, mind you. But nothing like this. The Saturn V, lying on its side, dwarfs the Redstone, Atlas and Titan boosters that sent the Mercury and Gemini astronauts into orbit. Even the Saturn IB is clearly the baby brother to this beast.

There's a certain rough and tumble nature to the whole thing. Here, in the very stfnal sounding year of 2001¹³, we come to expect a certain elegance in technology (says your humble author, who's decision on what notebook to purchase was in fact based partly on looks.¹⁴) There's little elegant about a Saturn V. This machine didn't gracefully soar to the sky. It clamber, shedding ice, shaking hither and yon, screaming a song too loud for mere humans to comprehend. In many ways, you could say the Saturn V yelled its way into orbit. The modern boosters, all mostly powered by solid fuel, sling their way into orbit in a fraction of the time, and with a fraction of the noise. The one thing they are impressive is the light show – the thin blue flame of a liquid oxygen oxidized engine is nothing compared to the giant yellow pillar of aluminum and ammonia perchlorate that the Shuttle and other modern boosters leap to orbit on.

Confused? Imagine what they felt like. Who's firing first? I don't know! S-IC!

¹² The name Apollo I was later granted to AS-204, at the request of Grissom's widow.

¹³ Sir Arthur's biggest miss? Toss up between “Pan-Am” and “The Bell System.” IMHO, of course.

¹⁴ The Apple PowerBook G4. The shiny, titanium one. I really bought it for the huge screen, but it still looks cool.



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It's an amazing place. I don't know whether to be heartbroken or proud. We do nothing of the sort these days. The Shuttle is slow, small, compared to the Saturn V – but the Shuttle's coming on 20 odd years of service – and has done some amazing things. I don't have the heart to call the Shuttle a mistake. Not when I saw one fly in December. Not whenever I see a new image from the Hubble Space Telescope. I wish I could hear the five throated voice of Ghu once again roar her symphony of noise and power – but I'm glad that her four little sisters' quieter song still rings out over the Florida fens six or more times a year. Yeah, low earth orbit is hardly the stars we were promised when I was young— but low earth orbit is much closer to the stars the I am.

The Monday following, Mike and I went back. That's another story.¹⁵

Midwest Construction

Steven H Silver

As Erik Olson noted above, it's all Tom Whitmore's fault. Actually, Midwest Construction is all Tammy Coxen's fault. Unlike Erik, I'm more than happy to tell you up front why it is Tammy's fault.

Following SMOFcon 18 in Cocoa Beach, there was a postmortem conducted on a variety of listserves. During one of these, Tammy Coxen commented that she felt that SMOFcon was targeted at Worldcon runners and that as she didn't plan to work on a Worldcon committee, at least not in the near future, the programming aspects of SMOFcon did not address what she was looking for. Instead, she had hoped to find a con which focused on running regional and/or local conventions.

Some of Tammy's comments struck a chord. Many people who could benefit from the SMOFcon style would not be willing or able to travel to the location of a SMOFcon, only two of which had been held in the Midwest, my own home-base. The Midwest, also, did not have the type of close-working fanbase which seems to exist in other parts of the country.

I contacted Erik Olson about the idea of putting together a SMOFcon-like event which would focus on regional and local con-running, specifically in the Midwest, although open to fen from other regions. He liked the idea. We ran it by a few other people and

received a mixed reaction, although significantly more positive than negative. We began planning.

The first Midwest Construction is set to take place in Glenview, IL, a suburb of Chicago on the weekend of September 20-22, 2002. If it goes well, a second Midwest Construction may take place somewhere else the following year.

The convention will focus on aspects of running conventions with the emphasis on local and regionals in the Midwest. All attendees will be expected to participate in programming and sharing their knowledge, experience and problems. On Sunday, there will be a brunch/business meeting, at which future Midwest Constructions will be discussed.

If there are future Midwest Constructions, one thing which might fit the theme nicely would be an in depth critique of a specific con held during the previous year. This would allow all the members to discuss one convention and look at its strengths and weaknesses and figure out how to improve that particular convention and avoid repeating whatever mistakes it may have had.

Of course, the first step is the hold Midwest Construction 1 and achieve a level of success and usefulness to make people want to attend a Midwest Construction 2.



¹⁵ Oh, Yeah. You're probably wondering **why** it was Tom Whitmore's fault. Simple. A whole bunch of smoffish fen kept coming up to me at the end of Chicon 2000 and asking/stating "Are you going to SMOFcon? You'd really enjoy SMOFcon." Tom was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back and sent me to Florida. His fault. Someday, I'll forgive him – or thank him. Maybe both.



ARGENTUS



MIDWEST CONSTRUCTION



Website: http://www.sfsite.com/~silverag/Midwest_Comcon.htm

Discussion List: Midwest_Comcon-subscribe@yahoogroups.com

MIDWEST CONSTRUCTION is a convention for con-runners and planners focusing, but not limited to, the Midwest*.

Currently in early planning, the first **MIDWEST CONSTRUCTION** is scheduled to take place September 20-22, 2002, in the Chicago area. Subsequent **MIDWEST CONSTRUCTIONS** will take place throughout the Midwest.

The purpose of **MIDWEST CONSTRUCTION** is to share information, techniques and experiences in con-running so we don't all reinvent each other's mistakes and miss out of each other's successes. **MIDWEST CONSTRUCTION** will focus on running regional and local cons in the Midwest.

If you are interested in joining the pre-con planning discussion, or for up-to-date information on **MIDWEST**

CONSTRUCTION or other conventions in the Midwest, look at our website or join the Midwest Construction Discussion List.

Workshops, Discussions, Panels, and Food. **MIDWEST CONSTRUCTION** will examine con-running topics from hotel relations to selecting guests, developing strong programming to building membership. **MIDWEST CONSTRUCTION** will draw on the membership's expertise to create a weekend of learning

For information, contact Steven Silver at shsilver@sfsite.com or 847-607-0776. 707 Sapling Lane, Deerfield, IL 60015-3969



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MIDWEST CONSTRUCTION

SEPTEMBER 20-22, 2002

Mail to: Midwest Construction
c/o Midwest Fannish Conventions, Inc.
707 Sapling Lane
Deerfield, IL 60015-3969

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Country (if not USA): _____

Phone: _____

E-Mail address: _____

Names of Additional
Members: _____

Enclosed \$ _____ for _____ 3 Day Attending Membership(s) @ \$40.00* each

Enclosed \$ _____ for _____ Supporting Membership(s) @ \$25.00** each

\$ _____ Total enclosed

Please make checks payable to Midwest Construction 1

Midwest Construction is sponsored by Midwest Fannish Conventions, Inc., a 501(c)(3) Non-Profit Organization

*Rate applicable through January 31, 2002

**Supporting memberships may be converted to attending memberships.



The Best African Movies

Mike Resnick

Steven Silver has requested (read: cajoled, begged, and threatened to hold his breath until he turned blue) that I select and discuss the best films ever made about Africa.

I usually don't write about films, because people usually ask me to write about science fiction films, and I believe the good ones can be counted on the fingers of one mangled hand. But Africa is another matter: there are quite a few good ones, well over a dozen, which is a lot for any one category.

So let's get going.

1. **ZULU** (1964). This is not only the best African movie ever made for theatrical release, but quite possibly the best war movie as well. It stars Stanley Baker, and features Michael Caine's screen debut.



It's based on a true story. In 1879, four thousand Zulus swept out of the hills and massacred a British column of 1,500 men at Isandhwana. (That story is covered in the much inferior prequel, *ZULU DAWN*, starring Peter O'Toole and Burt Lancaster.) The next morning they attacked a little outpost at Roarke's Drift, some 12 miles away.

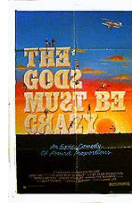
Roarke's Drift had 128 men, many of whom were sick or injured. Yet those 128 men held the Zulus off and fought them to a standstill. More Victoria Crosses were presented to the defenders of Roarke's Drift than in any other British military action in history. The movie is a pretty fair representation of what happened, and is absolutely riveting from start to finish.

2. **KING SOLOMON'S MINES** (1950). This one is much the best of four versions of H. Rider Haggard's classic novel of African adventure. Stewart Granger is perfect as Alan Quatermain, the quintessential white hunter who is weary of it all but is talked into one last impossible undertaking. Deborah Kerr is outstanding as the woman who hires him (in the book it was her husband, but Hollywood needs love interests, and this one was better than most.)



The scenery, from desert to savannah to highlands, is exquisitely photographed, the wildlife stampede has never been equaled, and Granger seems right at home in the part—as well he should be. He played an almost identical part in *THE LAST SAFARI*, a nice but not-quite-outstanding film, and often went on safari himself between films.)

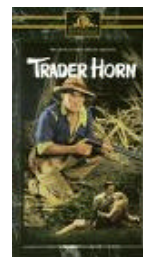
3. **THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY** (1980). This is



about as charming as movies get to be. Produced, written and directed by the remarkable Jamie Uys, it tells the story—with huge amounts of humor—of the Noble Savage encountering Civilization and overcoming it.

N!xau and the Bushmen are wonderful, and somewhere along the way, Uys found one of the finest physical comedians, Marius Weyers, ever to work in film. From the first scene to the last, this is an absolutely captivating fable, a charmer on the level of *HARVEY* or *THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS*.

4. **TRADER HORN** (1931). This may have been Hollywood's most ambitious undertaking ever. It was the first feature film to be shot on location, it took a couple of years to complete, and a star (Edwina Booth) and a number of crew members died from diseases they picked up there.



This is based on the two-time bestseller (first when it was presented as non-fiction, again after it was unmasked as fiction), about Aloysius

Horn, an old African hand who trades up and down the Dark Continent's rivers back in "the earlies", and winds up finding every explorer's dream—a white goddess.

The dialog is absolutely charming, most of it lifted from the book, and Harry Carey delivers it well. A very young Duncan Renaldo, later to become TV's Cisco Kid, co-stars. But the real star is Africa itself, brought to American screens for the first time in a feature film. (Martin and Osa Johnson had brought back the first of their silent documentaries, *SIMBA*, two years earlier.)

You can see Africa as it was 70 years ago, when it seemed like the animals would go on forever, and the natives didn't climb into their blue jeans and t-shirts when the cameras stopped grinding. A Romantic film, with a capital R.

5. **THE AFRICAN QUEEN** (1951). Bogart's Oscar winner, well-deserved, with an equally powerful performance from Katherine Hepburn, and a small but memorable cameo by Robert Morley. A classic tale of love and adventure, beautifully told by the master director John Huston.

There's been even more written about the making of the movie than





about the movie itself. The novel (later a Clint Eastwood film) *White Hunter, Black Heart* was an expose of Huston's obsession with killing an elephant to the point where he ignored the safety of all involved in the film. Hepburn, too, wrote a book about it.

But when all is said and done, it is the film that is the masterpiece, and the rest, however fascinating, is just associated material.

6. **WHITE MISCHIEF** (1987). Originally I was a bit disappointed in this film, which stars Charles Dance, Greta Scacchi, and Joss Ackland. It's taken from a book about the murder of a member of Kenya's "Happy Valley" crowd, and most of the book deals with the facts of the murder and the court case.

Then I watched it again, and realized that director Michael Radford had told a totally different story, using the murder merely as a plot device to hold the film together. Kenya was largely populated by remittance men, second sons, dilettantes and no-goods who were no longer welcome in British society. (There was an old saying: "Are you married, or are you from Kenya?" It was said than an entire generation of colonists was conceived on the pool table of the plush Muthaiga Club.)

The movie is actually about the now-vanished days of sex, drugs, drink, parties, and total irresponsibility, and how—because of the murder—they finally came to an end. I was guilty, the first time I saw it, of the cardinal sin of reviewing (in my head, anyway) the movie I wanted to see rather than the one Radford wanted to make. I've seen it four times since then, and have appreciated it more each time.

7. **MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON** (1990). An old-fashioned, big-budget historical adventure film, the type almost no one makes any more. This is the story of the search for the source of the Nile, and of the friendship between Sir Richard Burton (whose life I science-fictionalized in *A Miracle of Rare Design*) and John Hening Speke,

which eventually turned into a bitter rivalry and hatred.

Excellent acting jobs by Patrick Bergin and Iain Glen, and thoughtfully directed by Bob Rafelson. It's not anywhere as romantic as Hollywood would have made it in 1935 or 1960, but it *feels* right.

8. **DINGAKA** (1965). The very first film by the multi-talented Jamie Uys, who wrote and directed it. This is the flip side of *THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY*, a serious story of the Noble Savage running head-first into Civilization.

It ostensibly stars Stanley Baker, but the true star and the major character is the African played by Ken Gampu,

who finds that whether he obeys the law of the tribe or the white man, he breaks the law of the other.

It's just a little out of balance, because to get funding for the film Uys had to spend too much time on a totally meaningless marital crisis between Baker and Juliet Prowse, but the film's virtues—the power of the story, the power of Gampu's acting, and the best musical score ever in an African film—more than make up for it.

9. **THE KITCHEN TOTO** (1988). Almost unknown in America, though it's in a few rental stores, this is a powerful and relentless Kenyan film about a small boy, a "kitchen toto", who finds himself trapped in the violence of Mau Mau in 1953.



It's grim, it's accurate, it's well-acted, and director Harry Hook is in total control of his material. I don't think there's ever been a time when this

one could have been made in America.

10. **OUT OF AFRICA** (1985). The only African movie ever to get the Oscar for Best Picture, it's taken from the classic book by Karen Blixen, who just missed beating Hemingway out for the Nobel Prize. The



photography is beautiful, Meryl Streep gives the performance of her life, and Klaus Maria Brandauer is excellent as Bror Blixen, about whom numerous books have been written and a good movie should someday be made. No expense was spared, and every penny can be seen on the screen.

So why do I rank so many African films above it?

Two reasons. The first is Robert Redford, who is hideously, fatally wrong for the role. (Denys Finch-Hatten was a balding, well-spoken Etonian, not a California beach boy). The other is that the film, like the book, doesn't lie in any particular about Karen Blixen's life, but the whole thing is nonetheless a lie. She went home almost every year, spent less than seven years total in Africa though she owned the farm for well over twice that long, took other lovers before Finch-Hatten, was advised by every colonist she knew not to try to grow coffee at her farm's altitude, found new ways to scam living money out of her family every year. None of that was in the book, and it wasn't in the movie, but given the number of Blixen biographies that have been published over the years, it's common knowledge—and since it *is* common knowledge, I consider it a cop-out that the film tried to present her as a tragic, put-upon heroine. She was one of the most brilliant writers of this or any century; that ought to be enough.





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11. **BORN FREE** (1966). A truly heart-warming movie about Joy Adamson's extraordinary experiment: to successfully reinsert a human-raised lion into the wild.



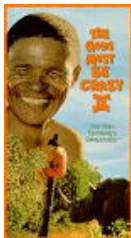
You couldn't ask for two better people to play the Adamsons that Bill Travers and Virginia McKenna, and James Hill directed the film to perfection.

(Side note: Travers and McKenna—and Hill—made two non-fiction films set in Africa, and both are available in video rental stores: **AN ELEPHANT CALLED SLOWLY** and **CHRISTIAN**

THE LION. Since they're scripted, I don't list them with the documentaries, but they're both good enough so they should be mentioned *somewhere*.)

The logistics of making **BORN FREE** must have been enough to drive everyone wild. These weren't trained circus lions, but real African lions, raised by George Adamson. As such, no single lion could do everything the film required. There were four separate Elsas—a car-riding Elsa, an animal-herding Elsa, etc., and the same for most of the others. It is a film that time hasn't diminished, done with love and care.

12. **THE GODS MUST BE CRAZY II** (1990).



Okay, so Jamie Uys isn't perfect. This one's not quite as good as the original, simply because he has too damned many story lines to keep track of, and while he eventually ties them up, the constant back-and-forth dilutes the power of the fable.

Still, he came up with another top-notch physical comic, this time in the voluptuous person of Lena Farugia.

N!xau is back, but has almost nothing to do but ran endlessly after a truck. There are two wonderful children, two hilarious soldiers, and a captivating gangster. It's not up to the first one, but it's still a lot of fun.

Honorable mentions

WHITE HUNTER, BLACK HEART
THE LAST SAFARI
THE NAKED PREY
MISTER JOHNSON
SANDS OF THE KALAHARI
THE AIR UP THERE
THE GHOST AND THE DARKNESS

(Made for Television Division)

1. **THE FLAME TREES OF THIKA** (1981, 7 hours). It's not fair to compare this film to theatrical releases, because it occurs in 7 one-hour episodes. Of all

the countries in Africa that I have been to, Kenya is the one I love and keep returning to. This movie demonstrates much of what I love about it.



It's based on Elspeth Huxley's two autobiographies, *The Flame Trees of Thika* and the first part of *The Mottled Lizard*, and is the story of her childhood in Kenya from about 1910 until the start of World War I. Hayley Mills puts in the best performance of her life at Elspeth's mother, Holly Aird plays Elspeth (but with a different name in the film), and David Robb is her father.

It is the simple story of a British family that buys a plot of farmland, emigrates to Kenya, and tries to make a go of it. Except that, given the location and the era, it's not simple at all. Farmers in Nebraska and Iowa don't have to face man-eating lions, rampaging elephants, and spear-carrying tribes that don't know what you're doing on their land but know that you didn't buy it from *them*.

It's told with charm and grace, the literate script does Huxley proud, the score is hauntingly beautiful, and director Roy Ward Baker has never been better. As I said, this cannot properly be compared with a theatrical release, but I think it is probably my favorite of all African films.

2. **SHAKA ZULU** (1986, 5 hours). This is the second of the two African masterpieces made for television. The



historical Shaka started out with a kingdom no larger than a couple of football fields. By the time of his death 12 years later, he ruled a kingdom three times the size of France. This is his story.

Shaka is brilliantly portrayed by Henry Cele, while the British company that finally makes contact with him features Edward Fox and Robert Powell. They learn his story as we do—through a fascinating, historically accurate two-hour flashback, in which we see him come to young manhood and totally reinvent the art of warfare. The efficacy of his methods speaks for itself.

So historically accurate was Shaka's village that a tour company bought it when the film was done, and it has become a pricey place to stay while visiting Zululand. Another historically accurate feature was the clothing, or lack of it—an awful lot of the female leads are bare-breasted, which has caused the movie to be cut by as much as two hours when playing on commercial TV, so make sure you see it on cable or rent it from a store. Either way, it's worth your time. If I could rank this with the theatrical releases, it would surely make the top five.

(North African Division)



There have been a lot of films made in Egypt and other parts of North Africa. I assume these were not what Steven meant when he asked me to rate the African films, but there are a few that bear mentioning.

1. **THE WIND AND THE LION** (1975). A



wonderful, romantic adventure film, very loosely based on an historical incident. Sean Connery is fine as the Raisuli, the last of the Barbary Pirates, and Candace Bergen probably puts in the most believable performance of her life as an American woman he kidnaps. John Huston has a wonderful cameo, the music is superb, and the

photography is outstanding. John Milius, one of my favorites, wrote the script and made his debut as a director.

But it was Brian Keith as Teddy Roosevelt that captivated me. Some of you may be aware of my fascination with Roosevelt, and that I've written half a dozen alternate history stories about him. Well, this is the film and the performance that first aroused my interest. Prior to this, I'd always thought of Roosevelt as nothing more than a jingoist, or a buffoon who runs who the stairs yelling "Charge!" (courtesy of **ARSENIC AND OLD LACE**). But after watching the fascinating and intelligent presentation of Roosevelt in **THE WIND AND THE LION**, I went out and bought every book by and about him that I could find, so this film holds a special place in my heart.

Just on merit alone, it would surely make the top 3 or 4 theatrical releases if I had not seperated North Africa out from the rest.

2. **KHARTOUM** (1966). A fine adventure film that will show you (assuming you ever wondered about it) why a government went to war over a man it despised ("Chinese" Gordon), and why it fell when it could not save his life.



Charlton Heston plays General Gordon, and plays him well. Richard Johnson is good in a secondary part. Ralph Richardson is fine in a cameo. But it is Lawrence Olivier who steals the film as the Mahdi, the Expected One, the bloodthirsty fanatic who at

one time controlled most of North Africa.

This is a film about the siege of Khartoum, and as such it's excellent, but it also goes a long way toward explaining two mysteries: Gordon's character, and why Khartoum has such historical importance.

(Special Note)



LAWRENCE OF ARABIA

(1962). I'll be brief. This is, by far, the greatest movie ever made. When ranking films on an all-time list, there is **LAWRENCE OF ARABIA** and there is everything else. It's as simple as that.

And since parts of Lawrence take place in Egypt and the Sudan, it qualifies as at least a part-African movie.

(Feature-length Documentaries)

Thanks to PBS, feature-length documentaries are now an extinct species. But there were some good ones while the species lasted.

1. **THE AFRICAN ELEPHANT** (1972). A beautiful film, and incidentally the last theatrical documentary ever made about Africa, this was photographed by Simon Trevor and narrated by David Wayne. It follows an African elephant from almost the moment of his birth to his 5-ton adolescence, and closes with some exceptionally rare footage of Ahmed of Marsabit, the huge tusker who was the only elephant ever protected by Presidential Decree.

2. **ANIMALS ARE BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE** (1974).

Yes, it's Jamie Uys again, with his one "documentary". I put the word in quotes because it doesn't qualify as a documentary by the strictest definition of the word; there are too many staged shots. But it's done with that wonderful Uys wit, and that makes it a keeper. You'll see elephants get dead drunk on fermented fruit, the world's clumsiest lioness, and some of the most fascinating beetles you can imagine. A delight, as per usual with anything by Jamie Uys. (He died last year, and boy, are we African filmbuffs going to miss him.)



3. **SIMBA** (1928). A silent film, this was the first documentary about African wildlife ever to hit the American theaters, and is the film that made Martin and Osa Johnson superstars. (It's available on videotape, as are half a dozen of their other documentaries, from the Martin and Osa Johnson Safari Museum in Chanute, Kansas.) It's fascinating to watch, if only to see the incredible hardships a 1920s safari had to undergo. Loading a reluctant camel could take half a day and cost a couple of broken limbs; driving across a rocky country with no roads could kill a car in a day; just crossing a croc-infested river without four-wheel drive was a study in logistics. And along with everything else, you'll get to see something that hasn't taken place in over half a century: a



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group of *Maasai elmoran* (young warriors) go lion-hunting armed only with their spears.

Honorable mention: **IN THE BLOOD**. Roosevelt descendants go on a nostalgic safari, retracing Teddy's footsteps, led by white hunter and author Robin Hurt and accompanied by *Village Voice* publisher and African novelist Bartle Bull.

#

Everyone is welcome to disagree with me. (You'll be wrong, but don't let that stop you.) But in the meantime, I hope I've pointed you to some films that have escaped your notice. It's a hell of a continent.





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MOCK SECTION: FILMS UNMADE

The following reviews are of films which have not been made. To the best of our knowledge, these films are not even being considered, at least not with the stated cast, producers, directors, etc. The films reviewed are entirely the result of the fevered imaginations of the reviewers who selected the texts to be adapted into the reviewed films. If you attempt to see these at the local multiplex or rent them on video, you'll be sadly disappointed.

BLOOD MUSIC

produced and directed by David Cronenberg, written by Andrew Niccol., based on the novel by Greg Bear. A Dimension Films release.
Adam Sandler, Christina Ricci, James Woods. Rated R.

By Dan Kimmel

(****) out of four

Vergil Ulam (Adam Sandler) is a geeky scientist working on an experimental process that combines living cells with computer chips. His goal is to make cells that can learn and transfer that knowledge when they reproduce. At the start of "Blood Music," the financing for the work is pulled and Ulam is told to destroy his samples. Instead he smuggles them out of the laboratory the only way he can think of doing: he injects himself with the "smart" cells.



Such is the nature of this truly bizarre film that the above description of the film's opening is the most easily understood part of the story. Director David Cronenberg ("Videodrome," "The Fly") and writer Andrew Niccol (who wrote "The Truman Show" and wrote and directed "Gattaca") have easily created one of the most astounding and intelligent movies of the year. As one might expect, it doesn't stand a chance at the box office.

What happens once Ulam leaves work is the start of an adventure that begins with the "noocytes," as he calls them, correcting various problems he has, from his vision to his receding hairline to his sex life. However as the story progresses we see that the cells are more than intelligent – they have developed their own agenda. Ulam quickly goes from being their creator to being their agent as they proceed to reorganize and perfect the world to form a new social order.

It was a big risk putting comedian Adam Sandler in the role, given that his fans are likely to be annoyed that there's little of bodily function humor they expect in a

typical Sandler outing. Apart from a shower scene where he realizes just how much the cells are doing to turn him into the world's greatest lover, there's little of that sort of humor here. Clearly he is here for insurance, much as Jim Carrey was used in "The Truman Show." Fortunately, as with Carrey, Sandler doesn't disappoint and shows their may be in actor inside him struggling to get out.

Other cast members handle their roles well, but are upstaged by the special effects, especially in the second half of the film when the cells literally take over the world. Christina Ricci has a nice turn as a troubled young woman whose life is changed as the noocytes expand their influence, while James Woods finds the sympathetic side to the role of Ulam's boss. As he realizes Ulam has created, in effect, a communicable disease that can think for itself, his character remains the scientist rather than an administrator looking to fix blame.

However the end results of this adventure are so mindboggling that audiences who refuse to suspend their disbelief are likely to respond with laughter or disgust rather than awe. Cronenberg and Niccol have remained faithful to Greg Bear's novel (itself an expansion on Bear's award-winning short story), and have made what is, in fact, an optimistic movie about life as we know it coming to an end. It's not going to be for every taste. Cronenberg was precisely the right director here given that several of his films have had to do with characters discovering that they are at war with their own bodies ("The Fly," "The Brood," "Scanners"). Here he finally gets to tell that story on a grand scale.

See "Blood Music" fast. It isn't likely to be in theaters very long, and you shouldn't have to wait for the video release to catch what will undoubtedly be one of the most provocative movies of the year.

THE WAR OF THE WORLDS

A film review by Mark R. Leeper
Copyright 2001 Mark R. Leeper

Capsule: Paul Verhoeven's "Hollow Man" played with ideas that were clearly borrowed from H. G. Wells's "The Invisible Man." Now he is not just playing around, he is



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going for the throat. This is a bigger production that starts with the plot of “The War of the Worlds” and hangs on it bits and even scenes from a lot of other films. We have a no-holds-barred alien invasion film that is willing to kill off whole cities for the camera. The ideal version of the Wells novel has yet to be made, but Verhoeven is marginally more accurate to the source material than the familiar George Pal version. The special effects are on a larger scale than those in “Hollow Man.” Much of the audience will get pulled into the action and will not care that the writing borrows so much from many other films. Rating: 6 (0 to 10), high +1 (-4 to +4).

In retrospect there was something positively refreshing about George Pal's 1953 film “The War of the Worlds.” Over the years we have seen many alien invasion films in which the aliens come as seed-pods to replace us, or they have an advance guard take over our minds, or they seed our planet with alien vampires. Sometimes they really are friendly; sometimes they only pretend to be friendly; sometimes they are nasty and hide out in swamps; sometimes they steal our scientists. There are only a very small handful of films in which the aliens try straight-ahead overwhelming us with sheer military power. In most of them the aliens equivocate by negotiating at some point as they do in “The Mysterians” or “Earth vs. the Flying Saucers.” Almost unique among these films, until now, has been Pal's “The War of the Worlds” in which the implacable aliens arrive with incredible power and start to pound humanity flat—no negotiation, no communication, no quarter given. That is perhaps a very believable scenario for an alien invasion, but since “The War of the Worlds” nobody has really wanted to tackle it in a movie. Now Paul Verhoeven tries it and in spite of making some of the same mistakes Pal did—updating the story and not setting it in London—the writing does show some respect for the original material.

A large and futuristic looks capsule comes from nowhere out of the sky, untracked by radar, and splashes down near the Tappan Zee Bridge. For sixty hours the capsule remains under water in ominous silence. Without warning several major cities get their own capsules including London, Berlin, Delhi, and Beijing. Perhaps the best moments of the script are the tension before the initial attack. The story takes its time, slowly revealing more and more about the alien ships. The script, which was co-authored by Verhoeven and Andrew W. Marlowe, consciously mimics disaster film writing introducing a large number of characters, many played by solid but second string actors. Most of the script is seen through the eyes of Jeff Bridges as a writer who, like the main character in the book, is never named. Robert Duvall plays a rather quiet President of the United States is worried and too indecisive to do anything about what may

be a peril. He is aided by Ferrall (Frank Langella) whose ex-wife Davida (Caroline Simpson) is a whiz with computers and the Internet. What she does is the key to a major battle sequence in the film, though I left the theater wondering if one could actually do that with current software technology. Nevertheless it is believable in the story. Meanwhile when the attack begins, the writer is quickly separated from his wife (Elizabeth Shue) and spends much of the rest of the film looking for her and simply observing the destruction done by the tripods.



The tripods deserve some mentions, incidentally. Every since Wells wrote the book, fans have argued about how a tripod could reasonably walk. And even if it could manage to walk it would look outdated compared to our modern weaponry. If there is anything imaginative in this film it is the imaginative futuristic look of the tripods and the coup of the filmmakers in getting around the problems of tripod locomotion. One rather imagines that we are going to see toy versions of the tripods for years to come. Battles of the tripods against modern battleships would probably have delighted even Wells.

Verhoeven and producer Alan Marshall freely admit in interviews that there is much in “War of the Worlds” that was inspired by other films. They cite 1940s war films and 1970s disaster films, but whole scenes seem to be lifted from films like the Pal film, “Independence Day,” “Alien,” and even “Earth vs. the Flying Saucers.” In spite of the safe route of borrowing from established films, the script does take some chances. While the script is heavy on coincidence and melodrama it never fails to be fun.

If this is not an intelligent film, it is not a really dumb one either. In spite of the updating there are long sequences that seem closely borrowed from the book. Details like how the Martians feed have never appeared in any of the dramatic versions before. “War Of The Worlds” is a big spectacular, almost two and a half hours, with its share of script problems. Much the same can be said of films like “The Ten Commandments” or “The Towering Inferno.” It is not intelligent, but it is fun. There is enough good to compensate for the negative points. I rate it a 6 on the 0 to 10 scale and a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale.

Spoiler...Spoiler...Spoiler...Spoiler...Spoiler...Spoiler...Spoiler



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The film makes a major digression from Wells in the epilogue. If the Bridges character is to die on Mars, it is unclear who wrote the manuscript we see at the beginning of the film. He could not have written it before he left. Parts of the manuscript could be written only by Bridges because he was the only one present to see everything that was happening. I suppose that after the death of the Martians the filmmakers felt they needed a more spectacular ending but much of the logic of the film is betrayed. I think the script should have had one more re-write to take care of this problem. They could have gotten around the problem by just saying that Bridges had told his whole story to the gunner when he had a chance, but there is nothing in the script to suggest he did that and it does not seem likely he would have volunteered the story.

THE STARS MY DESTINATION

Verhoeven's "The Stars My Destination": Splashier than the Milky Way and with More Sex and Violence
By Bob Blackwood

Who would have thought that 2003 would have ended with the release of Paul Verhoeven's unique crafting of the Alfred Bester novel, "The Stars My Destination?"

Stars, often described by many science fictions fans as a mix of twentieth century psychedelic poetry and 17th century Jacobean drama, originally depicting the abandonment of a humble crewman on a spaceship, has been transformed by Verhoeven's vision. This \$400 million spectacle fuses a computer-generated character with live actors into a mélange that dares to challenge the political correctness of our era.

Who but Paul Verhoeven would have reached into his bag of tricks to re-work the image of John Wayne? Yes, the Duke rides again in this epic, though the Native Americans and the U.S. Cavalry do not appear in this drama of the 25th century.

Of course, some may argue that Verhoeven's changing the revenge-seeking Gully Foyle of the novel into a vicious bisexual brute who trades in his jaunting teleportation skills for the ability to charm anyone and then kill, maim and sodomize his victims may be going too far.

Other fans and critics, of course, highly praise the sequence where Wayne's character uncrosses his legs beneath his gold plated kilt in the Ceres pattern, noting the sequence as an "homage" to Verhoeven's key to Sharon Stone's character in his own "Basic Instinct" (1992).

Some may say that the Foyle character loses the empathy that the audience has for the wronged spaceman when he violates Presteign of Presteign and his daughter,

Olivia Presteign, and then shoots them full of holes in slow motion while re-loading his gun repeatedly.

But then, as Verhoeven is alleged to have said, "I see the trauma done to the character of Foyle by the Presteign family as changing both his sexual orientation and enhancing his violent rages. Let's face it, if John Wayne were alive today he would be playing both gay and straight roles. How could he resist a role where he plays an unsympathetic brutal monster? It's a stretch that only the Duke would have the guts to make."

Despite Verhoeven's arguments and his deal with Republic Pictures and Warner Brothers for Wayne footage, most notably from Ford's "The Searchers" (1956), the Wayne family is apparently persisting with its \$200 million lawsuit against Verhoeven and the studio.

Verhoeven, who had been raked over the coals before by science fiction fans for his treatment of Robert Heinlein's novel in his 1997 production of "Starship Troopers," was allegedly overheard to have said to his cinematographer, "I can't understand why the Wayne family is objecting.

"After all, I had the Duke use a Winchester '73 when he shot up the Presteigns. I could have used a fully automatic weapon or a 75mm recoilless rifle, as my prop man was urging me to do.

"Frankly, I wanted to stay authentic, close to my source, and I don't think any reasonable person should object to this interpretation."

BUGGERS

This Bug's For You
by Bob Devney

In the tradition of "Starship Troopers," "Wing Commander," and "Battlefield Earth," "Buggers" is a sci-fi extravaganza that just won't quit!

The coolest kidflick/science fictioner/adventure story/Starfleet Academy ripoff of this summer of 2002, "Buggers" is the story of a boy who becomes a man who thinks like a bug. Scuttle to the next showing at your local cineplex. Within 10 minutes, you too will smell a hit.

Young Andy Higgins (Haley Joel Osment of "The Sixth Sense" and "A.I.") just wants to play his beloved video games. However, he's a real brainiac, so the feds rocket him instead to military school in a space station orbiting Earth. The students must train to face a coming war with the loathsome alien Buggers, hard-shelled horrors from a galaxy far far away ... but not far far away enough.

At first, the other kids don't like Andy, because he kills some of them when they tease him. But this touchy yet bright young Luke Fasttalker soon wins their



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acceptance and becomes the leader in playing all their space reindeer games.

Meanwhile, back on earth, Andy's dishy sis Valantyne (singer Britney Spears, unrecognizable with her midriff muffled) has got a computer jonz of her own. She's always on the net writing silly e-mail notes to her friends. But sis snaps out of it and takes a healthy interest in the opposite sex when hunky Academy Commander Gruff (Matt LeBlanc) comes down off his high orbit to ask her advice about Andy. Soon Val's got Gruff pinned down by more than Earth gravity, if you know what I mean.

The rest of the appealing cast is highlighted by Andy's sidekick, Beans (Jonathan Lipnicki, the kid in "Jerry Maguire"), who gets his nickname in the hilarious "Blazing Saddles" tribute scene. That's one mess hall food fight that turns into a real stinker. Also strong is Jamie Bell, the kid from "Billy Elliot." As Andy's villainous student rival Bozo, in one fateful bathroom ballet he learns to respect our hero's leadership potential and lethal groin kick.

Also, there's an amusing cameo about a much (much) older cadet who can't quite seem to graduate, but shows Andy the ropes (Kevin Bacon). And for the sake of his studies as well as all mankind, Andy must also spum the advances of the luscious-but-foreign-and-a-tad-too-lubricious space school nurse (Juliette Binoche, who's getting a tad too typecast since "The English Patient").

WARNING: SPOILER AHEAD !!!!

In the end, natch, Andy saves the universe through his amazing insights into the minds of his opponents. (This is heralded in Osment's trademark line from this flick, "I see bug people"). Plus in the final dramatic face-to-feeler confrontation with the Bugger Queen (Kathie Lee Gifford), Andy puts to use both his video game prowess and his skill at that supreme prep school sport: squash.

Insider Scoop: Hard as it is to believe, this project's beginnings were unpromising. For instance, in the first draft Andy is constantly referred to as "Ender," which name figured into several suggested titles. However, focus groups detected a gay connotation, so studio execs wisely settled instead on BUGGERS.

Reacting badly to this and other improvements, the original author/screenwriter ended up delaying the film's release via a chain of what the producers characterize as "sour-grapes lawsuits." A script doctor called in, Harlan

Ellison, fared little better. Studio execs state they were forced to nix a treatment wherein the Buggers triumph. Apparently this featured a climax with the awful arthropods' commencing to eat all Earthpeople, starting with someone named Forry Ackerman. (Much further legal action is pending.)

Luckily, supertalented director Joel Schumacher, veteran helmsman of such classic crowdpleasers as "St. Elmo's Fire" and "Batman and Robin," was able to thrust forward his own creative vision of the story via extensive rewrites, adding some badly needed style to the original boring tale.

Word from the set adds that director Schumacher formed a unique bond with this young cast—his very own "Boyggers," as he fondly nicknamed them—while he

guided them with firm hands through the trying months of shooting. The kids report he was especially strict during the film's six technically challenging shower scenes. Retake after retake were demanded until the totally spent auteur declared himself satisfied.

Speaking of technically demanding, younguns should find the scenes in the amazing Battlebowl especially cool. Apparently the film's special effects crew went through many painful readjustments during preproduction. Several conceptions of how these practice schoolroom "battles" might be

brought to the screen were tried and rejected, including the original script's ruinously expensive and impractical scheme.

But the result forms the heart of the movie's appeal for its bull's-eye audience of preteen sci-fi gamers.

Let's not give away too much here. I can only hint that the way the kids maneuver all around their simulated battlefield in "toons" and "armies" is really fun. The spaced cadets appear almost weightless as they zoom and swoop on their specially modified skateboards ...

All your thrilled reviewer can say about this unique production is, Hollywood's done it again!

PROJECT SHANGRI-LA

by Jeff Berkwitz

Project Shangri-La

Starring Denzel Washington, Tom Arnold, Sarita Choudhury

Directed by David Carson

Based upon the short story "The Nine Billion Names of God" by Arthur C. Clarke

Screenplay by Akiva Goldsman





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99 minutes
Rated PG-13

What weird malady causes Hollywood filmmakers to take perfectly good science fiction tales and mutilate them beyond recognition? It's certainly a shame when such travesties are inflicted upon decent SF narratives like *The Bicentennial Man*, *Enemy Mine*, or even *Battlefield Earth*: It's a crime when genuine classics are defiled. Sadly, such is the case with *Project Shangri-La*, a high-intensity, action-adventure flick loosely based upon Arthur C. Clarke's 1953 short story "The Nine Billion Names of God."

What's particularly unfortunate about this interpretation is that so much cinematic folderol has been added that the work is largely unrecognizable. George Hanley (Washington) and Chuck Woolsmith (Arnold) are two skilled electrical engineers assigned by their company to deliver a lightning-fast computer satellite setup to a remote Tibetan monastery. While journeying through Burma on the way to the abbey, Hanley falls in love with the gorgeous Metu (Choudhury), a mysterious woman who claims to have escaped from the harem of an opium dealer in the Golden Triangle. Once he allows her to join the expedition--against the advice of both Woolsmith and their native guide--a chase ensues, and the group find themselves pursued by both Indian hit men and Chinese martial arts experts.

Avoiding sundry silly and sensational attacks--including a ridiculous assassination attempt involving a cobra--the weary band finally arrive at the Himalayan mountain where the monastery is located. Led by a trio of somber cenobites, the party begin their treacherous hike up the steep path, trailed by a team of sherpas lugging their weighty provisions. After a couple of minor misadventures, they reach the summit and quickly set up the computer and satellite uplink. There Woolsmith uncovers the reason why this particular band of monks seeks the high-tech equipment: they're actually a breakaway Tibetan sect who hope to bring about the end of the Universe. Meanwhile, Hanley learns that Metu is not quite as helpless as she appears, and that the killers who are still hunting the group answer to a significantly higher power than an opium drug lord.

Although it's less than ten pages in length, "The Nine Billion Names of God" remains one of Clarke's most impressive tales. Poignant and contemplative, the narrative raises serious questions about humanity's relationship with both the cosmos and its Creator. Sadly, this cinematic interpretation of the story not only fails to address these momentous issues, it also lacks significant suspense or plot complexity, offering only pointless action sequences and a frustrating, nonsensical outcome.

With the exception of the conclusion, the core elements of the author's narrative remain relatively intact. Screenwriter Akiva Goldsman updates most of the work's obsolete technology, even incorporating a sly homage to Clarke when Woolsmith offhandedly remarks to one of the monks that, "none of this satellite mumbo-jumbo would be possible without that guy who wrote '2001.'" The key actors are also all respectable, especially Washington, who brings a remarkable level of understanding and intelligence to his portrayal of Hanley. The smoldering sexuality of Choudhury is commendable too, nicely recalling the passion of her previous pairing with Washington in the unsung drama *Mississippi Masala*. Even Arnold tones down his usual manic persona to a tolerable and, at times, quite humorous level.

David Carson, veteran of numerous *Star Trek*: *Deep Space Nine* episodes and the *Star Trek*: *Generations* movie, does a satisfactory job helming the flick. His television background is clearly evident--he has extensive experience directing such TV shows as *Northern Exposure* and *Beverly Hills, 90210*--with many of the more serene scenes obviously filmed on studio sets and most of the sweeping mountain shots utilizing stock travelogue footage. The picture's imagery and dialogue also hint at some of the more outrageous religious and societal beliefs engendered by the recent celebration of the Millennium. Although reasonably entertaining today, these segments would likely have been far more purposeful if the film had been issued prior to 2001 (the movie was originally scheduled to be released in late 1999, but was delayed due to unspecified "post-production problems").

However, it's the supplementary elements thrown into the plot that really mangle the picture. Rather than allowing the movie to address important theological or cosmological concerns, superfluous chases through street markets and silly sparring sequences--such as when a muscular monk engages in a martial arts battle with a cloaked hit man on the roof of the monastery--serve as overly zestful filler. Meanwhile, the CGI (computer-generated imagery) special effects accompanying the movie's climax, which occurs at a fanciful location where the Earth literally meets the Heavens, are mundane and surprisingly unimaginative.

In the end, *Project Shangri-La* isn't a complete washout, but it has unequivocally been adulterated by Hollywood's "glitterati." It's closer in attitude and ambiance to the latest installment of an *Indiana Jones* or *James Bond* adventure than the genuinely meditative and meaningful SF thriller that it could have--and should have--been.



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INTO PLUTONIAN DEPTHS

By Richard Gilliam

Director: Fred Olen Ray. Produced by New Horizons Cinema. Producer: Andrew Stevens Executive Producer: Roger Corman. Screenwriter: Sean O'Bannon. Running time: 97 minutes. MPAA Rating: PG-13.

Cast:

Zandaye Zandippar: Drew Barrymore
Andrew Stark: Eric Roberts
Dan Clayton: Treat Williams
Bretac, the Head Neuter: Flea
Lorax: Ross Hagen
Pikar Zandippar: Michelle Bauer
Brung Zandippar: Russ Tamblyn
Mirana: Aria Giovanni
Zelnee: Brinke Stevens
Nightwatchman: Dick Miller

When “Marooned On Pluto” was announced as Michael Bay's new blockbuster project, it was predictable that a rush of similar themed films would find green-lights. Given that his “Dinosaur Island” was an entertaining quick cash-in on the coat-tails of “Jurassic Park,” it's unsurprising that one of several Pluto-based films this summer is a low-budget effort from Fred Olen Ray. The good news is that “Into Plutonian Depths” is one of Ray's best efforts of recent years, and has the sort of smart, quirky sensibility that made Ray's “Armed Response” and “Hollywood Chainsaw Hookers” classics of their type.

Based on a Stanton Coblenz's 1931 pulp magazine novel of the same name, “Into Plutonian Depths” tells the story of two adventures (Treat Williams and Eric Roberts) who invent a “gravity insulator” that allows them to travel into space. Ray wisely leaves the film's establishing sequence unchanged from the author's then contemporary setting. Coblenz completed the novel only weeks after

astronomer Clyde Tombaugh's 1930 discovery of our most distant planet, a historical point screenwriter Sean O'Bannon amusingly makes reference to. The film gets its protagonists to Pluto in minimum screen time via a nicely done special effects shot of the spaceship's exterior against a background of stars, with the necessary transitory exposition contained in Roberts' voiceovers.

The explorers discover a civilization living under the planet's surface, inside air pockets kept fresh by algae pools that generate oxygen. The plot is mostly concerned with the efforts of the explorers to avoid the scheming of the monk-like “Neuters” a high-caste “third sex” that rigidly dominate the underground society. There's a nice romantic subplot between Williams and a Plutonian beauty (Drew Barrymore), complicated by both the woman's mother (Michelle Bauer) and the Head Neuter (Flea, from the Red Hot Chili Peppers.)

Much of the social-satire of Coblenz's novel is left intact, though the glowing-green forehead lamps of the Plutonians in the source story have been eliminated, most likely due to budget considerations. The film is at its most interesting in the sort of witty observational moments that have marked much of Ray's best work. The science, while preposterous in any realistic sense, nonetheless fits the film's offbeat attitude. As with most Fred Olen Ray films, there's a high density of creativity bursting from a low-budget container. It makes you wonder why Michael Bay with mega-millions at his disposal seems unable to buy a clue.

Roberts proves surprisingly adept at underplaying most scenes, helping to keep the film's exaggerated fantastic elements from slipping into parody. Barrymore, who gets top-billing for what is essentially a supporting role, is at her appealing best. Reportedly Barrymore's scenes were shot in three days, allowing Ray to exercise a seven-day minimum work option to get in four days of shooting with her on another film.

Pic, which is scheduled for early-summer release, should be profitable for distributor without much marketing effort. DVD with extra scenes and director's commentary is slated for November.

Editor's Note: The second issue of *Argentus* will contain a mock section devoted to con reports and reminiscences of that most famous of non-cons, the Worldcon held in Minneapolis in 1973. If you would like to send in your memories, a con report, pictures, or anything else related to Minneapolis in 73, please send it to Argentus at 707 Sapling Lane, Deerfield, IL 60015-3969 or e-mail it to shsilver@sfsite.com.



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Contributors

Michael A. Andaluz insists he is not the cause of the Detroit Riots. He's 34, and a resident of Pontiac, Michigan, who's dying to get his serious SF pubbed."

The professional credits are boring but here they are. Editor, *TANSTAAFL*, Magazine of the Ann Arbor Science Fiction Association Editor, Michigan SF Conventions, Open Directory Project at dmoz.org. Author, Gianni Bubonic, Episode 4b: A New Script (radio teleplays). Author, The Ice Train (e-zine serial, themestream.com). Completed story collections: *Ascent Stage 1* (seeking pub)

Jeff Berkwitz has covered science fiction media for numerous publications including GalaxyOnline.com, SciFiNow.com, SFSite.com, *Filmfax*, *Sci-Fi Universe*, and *The X-Files Official Magazine*, among others. He is currently a staff writer for Science Fiction Weekly and a regular contributor to both *Cinescape* and *SCI FI* magazines. During the mid-1990s, Jeff was also the publisher and editor of *ASTERISM: The Journal of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Space Music*.

Dr. **Bob Blackwood** is a retired professor of English and Communications Media from Wilbur Wright College, one of the City Colleges of Chicago. Dr. Bob is also a film critic for Chicago's "Near North News" and a reviewer of books on film criticism and related topics for *Choice*, the magazine of the American Library Association. When he is not being critical of films or books, he does some creative writing and teaches it too. He can be found at Andy's, a jazz club near State Street just north of the Chicago River where he, and his old pal Joe Maltese who works the door, will be listening and smiling a lot.

Raised by wolves mostly in Massachusetts, **Bob Devney** dens in North Attleboro, MA, emerging only to prowl bookstores and cinemplexes. He cherishes one wife who doesn't grok spec fic and three siblings who do. A graduate of Boston College (English major), Bob daily extrudes technobabble at a small ad agency. The only lazy member of the New England Science Fiction Association, he's nevertheless pubbed his ish approximately monthly since 1995, and somehow clawed his way to a Fan Writer Hugo nomination in each of the past four years. E-mail to bobdevney@aol.com inevitably occasions a free e-sub to *The Devniad*.

Richard Gilliam is the Director of Content for the All-Game Guide, overseeing work on one of electronic gaming's busiest websites. As an author, he's been a Bram Stoker Award finalist for his novella "Caroline and Caleb," and as an editor, a World Fantasy Award nominee for the much acclaimed anthology *Grails: Quests*,

Visitations and Other Occurences. A former sportswriter and prolific anthologist, his most recent book is *Joltin' Joe DiMaggio*, a selection of writings about the New York Yankees baseball star.

Rich Horton is an eclectic reader in and out of the SF and fantasy genres. He's been reading SF since before the Golden Age (that is, since before he was 13). Born in Naperville, IL, he lives and works (as a Software Engineer for the proverbial Major Aerospace Company) in St. Louis area and is a regular contributor to *Tangent*.

Daniel M. Kimmel is a movie/TV critic from Boston. He is the Boston correspondent for *Variety* and past president of the Boston Society of Film Critics. His book on the history of the FOX network is due out later this year. He is a regular panelist at Boskone and Arisia because he not only likes SF media -- he reads the stuff, too.

Mark Leeper has been a fan of science fiction cinema since an early age and has written about the subject from age ten. He later branched out to film in general. In 1978, Mark and his wife and unindicted co-conspirator Evelyn founded the Bell Laboratories Science Fiction Club, which the two have run ever since. Most of their energy is focused on the club's weekly publication, *The MT Void*, which features Mark's editorials and his film writing. Mark is the longest-running film reviewer on the Internet, regularly publishing reviews since 1980. He is married to the chronically Hugo-nominated Evelyn Leeper, co-founder of the Sidewise Award. His best known hobbies after film are travel (for which he also does a substantial amount of Internet writing), origami, and recreational mathematics.

Sue Mason is an artist and teacher of crafts. She's been involved in fandom since 1982 as a dealer, artist, gamer, costumer, conrunner, fanzine fan, where ever there are fans, she's happy! She was last year's TAFF delegate, that means that she was sent to the US by British fans for three weeks to meet fellow fans and be an ambassador of British fandom and to have a good time! When she's not in fan circles, I like canal boating, English Civil War re-enactment and good beer.

In 1999, **Erik V. Olson** crashed back into fandom in exactly the same way that bricks don't¹⁶. In three short years since the Great Ungafiation, he's made a mark on fandom that will fandom will be hard pressed to remove¹⁷.

¹⁶ This is the Douglas Adams memorial footnote. Remember, kids, if you use a riff from a living author, it's plagiarism, but from a dead author, it's honoring his memory.

¹⁷ Much like the aforementioned bricks.



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He is a long time denizen of rec.arts.sf.fandom, where his ability to create new spellings for old words has left him wondering just what happened to "Editorial Judgement." Still, he's thanks, and forgives, Steven for allowing him his first paper published fanac -- unless you count a reformatted USENET bit reprinted in a Minicon program book. Your call.

When **Mike Resnick** isn't sitting down at his keyboard to knock out essays on life and fandom, he's been known to turn his attention to writing professional fiction, a hobby which has, so far, netted him 4 Hugos, a Nebula, and a variety of other awards. Some of Mike's novels include *Kirinyaga*, *Santiago*, *The Outpost*, and *The Best Rootin' Tootin' Shootin' Gunslinger in the Whole Damned Galaxy*, which it is rumored he wrote to prove he could come up with titles longer than one word.

Pat Sayre McCoy is a law librarian at the D'Angelo Law Library, University of Chicago. She is the author of two sold short stories, "Winter Roses" in *Sword and Sorceress XII* and "The Last Swan Princess" to appear in *Sword and Sorceress XX*. She is also active in Chicago area cons, having been Green Room Manager for several Windycons, Information Desk manager and currently, co-guest liaison for Windycon. She was Green Room manager and Assistant Programming Director for Chicon 2000. In her spare time she writes, coaches and plays field hockey for the University of Chicago club team and spoils her friends' children. She lives with her husband and two bossy cats in Hyde Park.

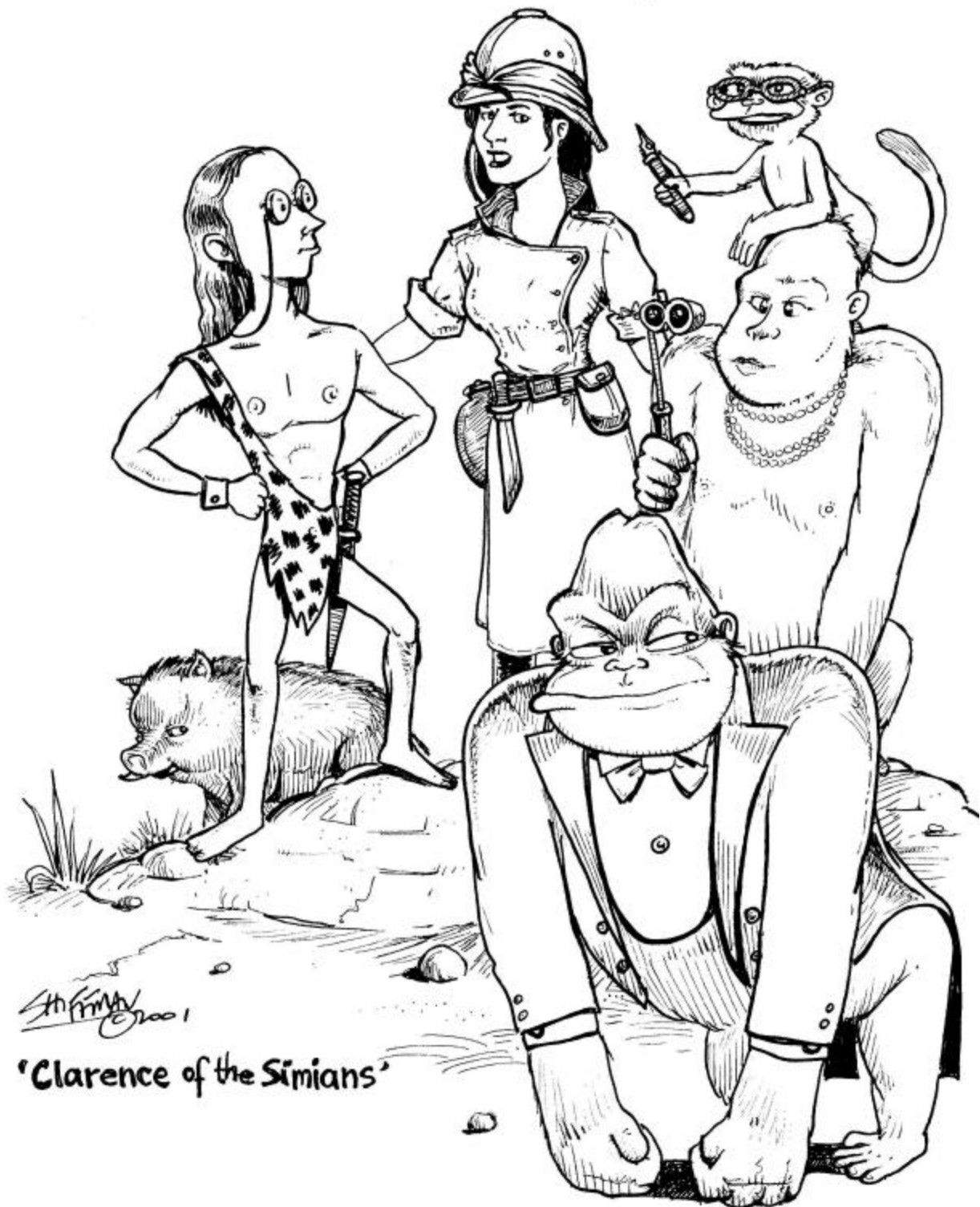
Stu Shiffman is a familiar name to science fiction fandom where he was active for many years in, among other pursuits, Fanoclads, fanzine publishing and the Flushing in '80 Worldcon bid ("Wild moose races in Shea Stadium!"). His art has graced the covers and pages of innumerable fanzines and apas, as his writing has the interiors. In 1981, he was Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund (TAFF) delegate to the British National Convention or "Eastercon" in York, Yorcon II. Stu received the "Hugo" award from the 1990 World Science Fiction Convention for the best amateur artist category. His "Saks and Violet" was a backup feature in Will Shetterly's "Captain Confederacy" comic series during the late 1980's. Alternate history is a passion of Stu's, and he is now one of the judges for the Sidewise Award for Alternate History (see <http://www.uchronia.net/sidewise/>). He is also a passionate fan of Sherlock Holmes (a member of Hounds of the Internet and Puget Sound scion Sound of the Baskervilles), P. G. Wodehouse (member of PGW - Net), classic cartoon animation and mystery & detective fiction (and worked as co-head of publications for the 1994 Bouchercon in Seattle). Stu currently lives in Seattle with the charming Andi Shechter. Check out their Roscoe Page website (<http://www.drizzle.com/~roscoe/>).

Steven H Silver is one of the founders and judges for the Sidewise Award for Alternate History. He is a freelance book reviewer with reviews appearing in *BookPage*, the *New York Review of Science Fiction*, *SFRA Review*, *Tangent*, *Cinescape*, *Yellow Submarine* (French), *SF Site*, and other places. His first convention was Windycon XIII in 1986. He joined the ranks of conrunners in 1996. In 1998, he was elected to the ISFiC board of directors. He is a two-time Hugo nominee for best fan writer and was sentenced to be Programming Director for Chicon 2000. He has been a Contributing Editor to *SF Site* since 1997. In 2001, he set up Midwest Fannish Conventions, Inc. and began planning for Midwest Construction 1, a conrunners con.

Dave Truesdale has been editor of *Tangent*, and now *Tangent Online* (www.tangentonline.com) since 1993, the only review magazine devoted entirely to short science fiction, a three-time Hugo Award nominee (1997-1999). From 1994-2000 he was Preliminary Nominations Director of the Theodore Sturgeon Award for Best Short SF (but stepped down in 2001 due to a possible conflict of interest while first reader for a new fantasy magazine with which he is no longer associated). A World Fantasy Award judge in 1998, he has been editor of the *SFWA Bulletin* since 1999. He lives in Independence, MO, a few minutes from downtown Kansas City.

Tom Whitmore is one of the three partners at The Other Change of Hobbit, has been a columnist for *Locus*, assistant chair of a Worldcon, and has won trivia contests at several worldcons, generally while working on them. He loves finding lost stories for people. In his spare time, he's also been a statistician for the Department of Energy, a tech writer, an art dealer and a researcher. He is currently the chairman for ConJosé, the 60th Annual World Science Fiction Convention.





'Clarence of the Simians'