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Intimacy & Sex on *Deep Space Nine*

By Wendy A F G Stengel

intimacy (in'te-me-ci), *n.* [*pl.* intimacies], 1. the state or fact of being intimate; intimate association; familiarity.

intimate (in'te-mit; *for v.* in'te-mAt), *adj.* [Fr. *intime* < L. *intimus*, super], 1. inmost; most inward; essential: as, the *intimate* structure of the atom. 2. most private or personal: as, one's *intimate* feelings. 3. closely acquainted or associated; very familiar: as, an *intimate* friend.

sex (seks), *n.* [ME.; Late Ofr. *sexe*; L. *sexus*; prob. < base of *secare*, to cut, divide], 1. either of the two divisions of organisms distinguished as male or female; males or females (especially men or women) collectively. 2. the character of being male or female; of all things which distinguish a male from a female. 3. anything connected with sexual gratification or reproduction or the urge for these, especially the attraction of individuals of one sex for those of the other.

— *Webster's New World Dictionary, College Edition*, The World Publishing Company, Cleveland and New York, 1957.

The notion and culture of intimacy in the *Star Trek* universe is often problematic. Though close non-working relationships between people are not explored to any depth in the original series (*ST:OS*), the idea that Star Fleet personnel have lives beyond their duty stations is accepted by *Star Trek: The Next Generation* (*ST:TNG*) and *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (*DS9*). With the advances of social psychology between the first series and *ST:TNG*, such an advance should not be surprising. The writers and producers during the series' hiatus may have read that, indeed:

"In twentieth-century Old Earth, a fast food chain took dead cow meat, fried it in grease, added carcinogens, wrapped it in petroleum-based foam, and sold nine hundred billion units. Human beings. Go figure." - Dan Simmons, *Hyperion*.

Friends may be good for your health! This startling conclusion emerges from studies on social support as a moderator of stress... In one study, Gore (1978) looked at the influence of social support in a sample of men who had just lost their jobs after a plant shutdown. Gore found that men with relatively strong social support from wives, friends, and relatives showed less emotional response to this highly stressful event and fewer symptoms of physical illness. (Weiten, 360)¹

One would think that, with the conscious addition of healthful family and romantic units to the *Star Trek* universe, the romantic and sexual relationships of the characters would be a primary source for interpersonal intimacy. Sadly, this is not the case. Though there are some strong intimate romantic and/or sexual relationships shown on the series, they are always either left behind or shown to be damaging to the station. The only intimacies that are shown in a consistently positive light are those of strong friendships.² The organizational benefit of friendship among comrades in arms is undeniable on the show, but the detrimental effects of denying characters the positive effects of sexual/romantic intimacy have implications reaching past the space station. By examining the different cultural expressions of intimacy on *DS9*—both in sexual/romantic relationships and in friendships—we will see how classifying sex and romance as dangerous has a lasting affect not only on the social structures of Star Fleet, but also those in modern-day living rooms.

In *DS9*, the writers set up elaborate cultural rules to regulate intimacies, particularly for the Trill species. When we consider that the Trill as a species is almost exclusive “property” of *DS9*, we must wonder what function is served by establishing a societal rule only to have our chief species representative break that rule. Jadzia is an intensely sexual character, and we learn from her recollections that in many, if not all, of Dax’s past lives, Dax has been just as sexually charged.³ Many of these sexual liaisons were just that: sex. Some were joinings of true intimacy. Both are sub-

ject to the rules of “reassociation.” Yet, the intimate friendships that Dax has experienced are allowed—even encouraged—to continue in an unbroken chain. Why forbid the one and not the other? In the modern military, there have long been rules against “fraternizing” within the ranks; the Trill taboo of reassociation serves the same purpose: framing sex as dangerous while friendship is vital. Closer examination will show that this structure frames not only Trill society, but that of the entire universe of *DS9*.

The Trill species was first introduced in *ST:TNG*. A Trill dignitary, Odan, was traveling on the Enterprise, and started a romance with Dr. Crusher.⁴ He was wounded, and, we discover, the symbiont he carries must be transplanted to survive. With no other Trill on board, the symbiont is transplanted into Commander Riker. Though Dr. Crusher has hesitations, they are quickly smoothed over, and the romance continues between her and Riker-Symbiont. Truly, it seems, it is what is inside that counts. Eventually, however, a Trill comes on board, and the symbiont is joined once more. The new host approaches Dr. Crusher, who decides she cannot continue her physical romantic relationship with the symbiont she loves, as the new host is female and Crusher says she can’t handle the “constant change.” Dr. Crusher’s love leaves; their love fades away.

With the dawn of *DS9*, the Trill is brought back with a brand-new look and a brand-new attitude towards relationships. We learn that the greatest taboo in Trill society is “reassociation”—when a new Trill-symbiont pair to have relations with the symbiont’s past lovers and families. The price for breaking this custom is dire; the transgressor symbiont will never be allowed to join with another Trill, and will die with its transgressor host. It’s a delayed death sentence; though there is no execution order, the host and symbiont must live out the remainder of their lives knowing that they will live and die outcast from all they were brought up to believe. Though this seems harsh to outsiders, the Trill defend it, saying that the new host has to be able to live his or her own life, and that contact with the new host causes too much pain for the survivors of the deceased host.

We learn this all in the fourth season, when we see Jadzia Dax,⁵ a young Star Fleet officer, in compelling struggle between sex and duty. Jadzia is surprised to find that Lenara Kahn is on the station. It seems that Lenara is a joined trill whose symbiont, Kahn, was joined with the wife of Torias Dax.⁶ One glance, and all the feelings of intimacy, love, and longing roll over both of them. Though they try to keep everything on the up-and-up, their attraction is evident. The audience members who were disappointed when Dr. Crusher couldn't accept her love in a female host have nothing to complain about in this episode. Jadzia



and Lenara kiss; a tender moment befitting husband and wife. They both know that this could be the end of the line for the Dax symbiont. They both know that Trills everywhere could ostracize them, but in the end, Lenara knows she can not break Trill custom. Dax is heartbroken. She was willing to throw away centuries of life and tradition for Kahn.

Reassociating would have caused chaos for Dax. However, the taboo doesn't carry over to friendships. Jadzia maintains a close friendship with Commander Sisko, whom Curzon Dax mentored through the Academy. Sisko counsels Jadzia during her turmoil over Lenara. When Sisko is frustrated, he uses Jadzia as a sounding board.⁷ It is as though she is still the "Old Man" he knew years ago; she calls him by his first name. Clearly, continuing the intimacies don't cause too much pain for Sisko, nor does Jadzia feel that she isn't living her own life. Instead, their friendship builds the strength of the station.

Jadzia invests considerable energy into engaging Curzon's Klingon compatriots Kor, Koloth, and Kang. Unlike Sisko, they do not accept that the woman standing in front of them is the same grizzled warrior who swore blood oaths with

them.⁸ Curzon was almost Klingon in their eyes. Through perseverance, and a passionate speech about Jadzia's pain at the loss of Curzon's godson, the Klingons reluctantly agree to let her join their quest for revenge against the Albino. She shows her willingness to die for a blood oath sworn by Curzon, and they accept that she is their old friend. Instead of deepening the pain of mourning, the continued association with Dax eases some of the pain of losing Curzon. As for Jadzia, she feels compelled to join with the Klingons not because of some contractual duty, but because of the love Dax has for the Klingons and Curzon's godson. The fact

that Jadzia never met the boy is irrelevant to her, and the friendship that continues helps build trust between distrustful communities.

The power of continuing friendships from host to host is even more apparent when Dax is joined with Ezri. We first meet Ezri on Sisko's doorstep, calling him by first name, with full expectations that their friendship will essentially pick up where it left off.⁹ Sisko doesn't disappoint. Though he's distracted by his quest to find the prophets again, he asks his best friend, the "Old Man," to help him. Once installed on the station,¹⁰ she engages almost all of Jadzia's friends almost instantly. The suitors who once pursued Jadzia pursue Ezri with vigor. Put away your copies of Kübler-Ross; it is as though Dax's reappearance on the station means that grief for Jadzia can be suspended instantly, and everyone can go back to working as a flawless team.

The exception to her friendship bonanza, of course, is Worf. To understand why, we must look at Jadzia's relationship with Worf, one of the most interesting, complex relationships in Star Trek history. It is important to note that, for Worf, his relationship was with Jadzia, not with Dax. Though her knowledge of all things Klingon—a result of

the Dax/Curzon joining—attracted Worf, it is with Jadzia-the-woman as opposed to Jadzia-the-almost-Klingon that he opened up. We learned in *ST:TNG* that Worf refrained from sex with non-Klingons because, he believed, only a Klingon woman could “survive” sex with him. Once he and Jadzia begin “sparking,” we learn that Worf is also vehemently opposed to sex outside of a recognized marital union. She breaks down his resistance on both fronts. He never stops asking for her to make him an honest Klingon, and as they evacuate the station in the face of an invading force, Jadzia accepts his proposal; as long as he comes back to her, she’ll marry him.

They both return, and they marry, with all the pomp and circumstance of a traditional Klingon ceremony and a dash of fun in the form of a Trillian bachelorette party.¹¹ Dax must subdue some of her Trillian independence in order to placate her future foster-mother-in-law; her old friend Sisko reminds her that in choosing to love Worf, she has to put his feelings forward as a priority. It isn’t long before they are off on a mission together, a sort of save-the-Federation-and-have-a-spiffy-honeymoon trip to pick up a defector.¹² As they sit around the fire, it is clear that they are true intimates; they hold nothing from each other. The mission turns sour, and Jadzia is critically wounded. Worf must decide: save the mission, or save his wife. They decided together that he must continue with the mission and leave Jadzia to die. He says goodbye, and starts off to complete the mission. However, his love for Jadzia wins out over both Klingon duty and Federation orders, two things that ruled his life absolutely. The Federation could lose the war, Worf could be court-martialed, and yet, the intimate bond between him and Jadzia matters more. When they return to the station, Worf faces the conse-



quences of his actions, which turn out to be not as severe as they could have been. Being in trouble for saving the best friend of the Captain has its advantages. However, Worf has made his priorities clear—his duties to the station come second.

Just when we find out that Jadzia and Worf are planning to try to have a baby together—a potentially dangerous endeavor for Jadzia; can she carry a half-Klingon child?—we see her sense-

lessly slaughtered.¹³

Worf returns to the station just in time to say goodbye to Jadzia; Dax is already on the way to a new host. The thought that some part of her would live on without Jadzia upsets Worf fundamentally. His religious worldview¹⁴ cannot accept a physical continuity of his loved one; if Dax

lives on, Jadzia must not be in Sto-Vo-Kor. That would be impossible; everything in Klingon culture tells him so. It takes intense circumstances, heart-rending recollections, and a little forbidden sex¹⁵ to bring Worf around to accepting the continuity of Dax in Ezri. Though Worf begins to accept Ezri, they are not able to form a friendship; as the series ends, we are left with two officers who remain at best cautious around each other. They weaken the powerful bond of station’s crew.

The importance of intimate friendships is clear if we examine a relationship that doesn’t involve sex. At the beginning of the series, Miles O’Brien and Julian Bashir are collegial, but not friends.¹⁶ However, through the seven seasons, they develop an intimate friendship. From racquet ball early in the series¹⁷ to darts over a drink at Quark’s, they explore their hopes and fears. When Bashir is unmasked as genetically enhanced, they confront Miles’ anger and fears over a game of darts. They talk—long discussions about their loves, their joys, their frustrations—with a surprising amount of screen time spent on these bonding

moments as compared to plot-driving moments. Their friendship strengthens the station; playing together makes them work together better. From darts, they move to elaborate holosuite fantasies of the stereotypically mans'-man genre. They will defend the Alamo, no matter the cost!¹⁸

The cost seems to be O'Brien's intimate relationship with his wife. Miles and Keiko are the only visibly fecund people on the station, with one small child at the series opener and another conceived mid-series. Before Miles and Bashir begin to develop their friendship, Miles and Keiko are often shown discussing their days, their hopes and frustrations. When Keiko's curriculum comes under attack from the religious factions on Bajor, Miles comes quickly to her defense, alienating some of the people he has to work with.¹⁹ Their emotional ties to each other and their family unit are also shown when their daughter Molly is lost in a temporal snafu, and returns as a barbaric teen. Miles disobeys orders and goes with Keiko to return Molly to her new world. Again, we see that the ties of marital love come before ties to the station or crewmates. However, as "the boys" grow closer, Keiko drops out of the picture. When she is unable to carry their child to term, she begins to be removed from the emotional landscape.²⁰ Her research carries her off the station for prolonged periods, and Miles begins to rely more and more on Bashir. Though realists will point out that the actress playing Keiko wanted to devote more time to her other acting projects, one can't deny the impact on the characters: Miles does not rely on his wife for emotional intimacy. What might be seen as a societal downfall—another failing marriage—is instead a strengthening of the social unit of the station.

Beyond the intimacy of friendship and the intimacy of marriage and sex, *DS9* gives us one other foil: biological intimacy. Kira was biologically intimate with Keiko and Miles when she bore their child. The joined Trills are biologically intimate with the symbionts. Yet these examples are of a life within a life; in *DS9*, we see characters blending down to the very cell walls.²¹ In another "exclusive property" *DS9* species, the Founders meld with each other in the Great Link, sharing every thought, feeling, and cell structure. It would be merely another alien curiosity if not for Odo, the shape-

shifting security officer on the station. Odo is introduced as an outcast. There are no other shapeshifters known in the universe. He has been mistreated for years under the Cardassians, and lacks basic social skills. After the Bajorans and the Federation take over the station, he is exposed to caring co-workers, and begins to learn about friendship and trust. He builds strong—sometimes adversarial—relationships with the staff, especially Garek, Quark, and Kira. Growing in relation with them helps him become more "solid."

That goal is anathema to the Founders. Solids are inferior. When Odo finds the Founder home world, he is invited into the Great Link. Every part of himself—from memories and emotions to his bodily fluids—blends with the other shapeshifters. He is a changed man when he leaves the Link, and he is invited to stay with his kind.²² He agrees, until he discovers that the shapeshifters have abducted the station's crew. Stunned and saddened, Odo demands the release of his crewmates, and decides to return to the station. The shapeshifters do not understand, and leave the door open for him to change his mind.

In the time between their introduction and their eventual war on the Alpha quadrant, we know the Founders primarily through Odo's longing. His thoughts are often on what life would be like if he had others like him around. During this time, his friendship with Kira is developing into a romantic relationship. With the examples of Jadzia and Worf and the O'Briens, it would be easy to think that Odo and Kira's relationship would lead to a more unstable station environment. However, the truly destabilizing relationship is that of Odo and his kind, and it threatens not only the station, but also the entire shapeshifter species and the Alpha quadrant.

As the chief security officer, Odo is known for his dedication to the station and his keen eye for detail. It is shocking, then, when the Female Shapeshifter comes on board, and Odo loses track of time to such a degree that he "misplaces" days at a time.²³ His relationship with Kira and his duties on the station are simply pushed aside. The closeness he achieves with the Female Shapeshifter is all encompassing. The station crew

is understandably frightened; the wolf outside the chicken coop is distracting the farm dog. How long will it be before the dog is after the chickens himself? Loyalty is integral to the station, and though the divided loyalties of a sexual pair are destabilizing, the threat of this new biological intimacy brings untold danger.

As we find out, the biological intimacy is even more dangerous for the shapeshifter species as a whole. Star Fleet engineers a disease that will destroy the shapeshifters; if you can't beat them militarily, beat them in the infirmary. Luckily, they have the ideal method of delivery: Odo. When he bonds with the Female Shapeshifter, he unwittingly passes on the disease that will infect and, Star Fleet hopes, kill every shapeshifter in the universe. The fact that it will kill Odo, too, is of no importance, except, of course, to Odo's stationmates. When Odo falls ill, Bashir works diligently to find a cure. Once found, he goes against Star Fleet's—but not necessarily Sisko's—orders and heals Odo. Odo is then determined to heal the remaining shapeshifters.

Understandably, this doesn't sit well with Star Fleet brass; dealing with the illness has distracted the Founders from the war. If they are healed, they will undeniably refocus their efforts and win the war. The Alpha quadrant would fall. Odo flies in the face of orders, and calls the Female Shapeshifter to him. In a few short seconds, their blending is done. She is healed, spiritually as well as physically. From that one potentially sacrificial act—Odo knows that passing on the cure could destroy everyone he cares for—she decides that the war must end.²⁴ The biological intimacy is powerful, chaotic, and both destructive and creative.

Sexual and romantic intimacy share the creative and destructive potential of the biological intimacy. As we've seen, both are shown as dangerous; they threaten destabilization of the station. The intimacies found in intense friendships, however, ensure the station's stability and the ability of the crew to work together against insurmountable odds. The writers undoubtedly constructed the Trill taboo against reassociation to drive the storyline of "Rejoined," no one ever gets punished for breaking

the taboo, so it seems clear that it is just a plot device. It is, however, a plot device that works within the culture of intimacy of the *Star Trek* universe. It is dangerous if one is willing to sacrifice the station's safety for anything. It is vital that one be willing to sacrifice one's safety and even one's life for the benefit of the station. The culture doesn't support the implied notion that fostering intimacies within family and sexual/romantic units is important enough for Star Fleet to actively include such units on its ships and stations.

This culture of intimacy is problematic in "the real world" as well. Though it makes sense in a military environment for camaraderie to be prized and sexual relationships to be feared,²⁵ the fact of the matter is that military personnel are not the sole—or even primary—demographic sought by the producers of *DS9*. Instead, the producers are focusing on young, middle-class men. When you apply any of the reader response or narrative psychology theories, one must ask, how is the audience responding to the text, and how is the text responding to the audience? This is not merely an art-imitating-life situation; what we see on television does affect us as individuals.

The television medium is visual and verbal, and its effects are primarily cognitive rather than behavioral. It captures our attention by virtually forcing our eyes to concentrate and focus on a stream of constantly changing visual images. It teaches important lessons to people who *are not aware they are learning*. As viewers we suspend our critical and evaluative capacities, and in this passivity, we are most vulnerable. Television teaches us about worlds we have never experienced, and it often misinforms. What we see is often not real, and the lessons we learn from it are frequently wrong.²⁶

It is deeply concerning that the idealized future of *DS9* is a future in which people cannot seek their primary intimacies safely within their romantic/sexual relationships. Will generations of young men grow up mistrusting their partners,

unwilling to share themselves emotionally outside of platonic friendship? Are all the nice girls out there doomed to be “just friends” with any gent who watches *DS9*? The questions may sound flip, but what we read and watch, and the stories experience affect who we are. Art is dangerous; art which frames sex and other “couple-y” activities as dangerous is doubly so.

Notes/Sources

1. Weiten, Wayne. *Psychology: Themes and Variations, 2nd Ed.*, Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company, 1994.
2. Usually, the intimacy of friendship is only shown between male characters; Wendy A F G Stengel, “Friendship in the *Star Trek* Universe: Where Few Women Have Gone Before,” paper presented at the Annual PCA/ACA Meeting, 11-14 April, 2001, Philadelphia, PA.
3. In one of the most amusing revelations of Dax’s past, we learn that Dax has even had an encounter with one of the original *Star Trek* men: Dr. McCoy. Ronald D. Moore and Rene Echevarria, *DS9*, “Trials and Tribble-ations,” production number 503, original airdate: November 4, 1996.
4. Michael Horvat, *ST:TNG*, “The Host,” production number 197, original airdate: May 13, 1991.
5. Though I dislike the practice of referring to male characters by their last names and female characters by their first names, it will be necessary in this paper to refer to Trills by their first names to help keep things clear. Whereas Dax has been a composer, a dancer, a murderer, and even a lover of Dr. McCoy, Jadzia has not. It is not meant to be sexist; indeed, gender becomes a very murky subject when discussing Trills.
6. The nature of Trill joinings makes description cumbersome, so many texts rely on diagrams to express the continuity of self from body to body; Ronald D. Moore and Rene Echevarria, *DS9*, “Rejoined,” production number 478, original airdate October 30, 1995.
7. Michael Piller, *DS9*, “The Emissary, Part One,” production number 401, original airdate: January 3, 1993.
8. Peter Allan Fields, *DS9*, “Blood Oath,” production number 439, original airdate: March 27, 1994.
9. Ira Stephen Behr and Hana Beimer, *DS9*, “Image in the Sand,” production number 551, original airdate September 30, 1998; Ira Stephen Behr and Hana Beimer, *DS9*, “Shadows and Symbols,” production number 552, original airdate: October 7, 1998.
10. As I am using *DS9* as an abbreviation for the series *Deep Space Nine*, whenever I need to refer to the physical location of Deep Space Nine, I will refer to it as “the station.”
11. Ronald D. Moore, *DS9*, “You Are Cordially Invited...,” production number 531, original airdate: November 10, 1997.
12. Ronald D. Moore, *DS9*, “Change of Heart,” production number 540, original airdate: March 4, 1998.
13. Ira Stephen Behr and Hana Beimer, *DS9*, “Tears of the Prophets,” production number 550, original airdate: June 17, 1998.
14. Again, the difficulties of adapting a terrestrial language to a universal scale are difficult; perhaps this should be “universe view.”
15. Rene Echevarria, *DS9*, “Penumbra,” production number 567, original airdate: April 7, 1999.
16. Some readers will argue that O’Brien and Bashir have an implied homosexual relationship. I would argue that the male-male friendship is the most highly valued social unit in the *Star Trek* universe, and, for the purpose of this paper, I chose to deal with only the explicitly stated relationship: friendship.
17. Joe Menosky, *DS9*, “Rivals,” production number 431, original airdate: January 2, 1994.
18. In the end, their games take on an almost sacrosanct nature; after O’Brien leaves the station permanently, Ezri offers to save the Alamo with Bashier. He cannot share that intimate act with her, even though they are in an intimate relationship. Ira Stephen Behr and Hana Beimer, *DS9*, “What You Leave Behind, Part 2,” production number 576, original airdate: June 2, 1999.
19. Michael Piller, *DS9*, “A Man Alone,” production number 403, original airdate: January 17, 1993.

20. Stengel, "Friendship in the Star Trek Universe," 1999.
21. Interestingly, the lining of cell walls is called the "intimae," of similar origin as the word "intimate." *Webster's New World Dictionary: College Edition*, (Cleveland, OH and New York: The World Publishing Company, 1957).
22. Ira Stephen Behr, *DS9*, "The Search, Part 2," production number 448, original airdate: October 3, 1994.
23. Rene Echevarria, *DS9*, "Behind the Lines," production number 528, original airdate October 20, 1997; Ira Stephen Behr and Hana Beimer, *DS9*, "Favor the Bold," production number 529, original airdate: October 27, 1997.
24. Ira Stephen Behr and Hana Beimer, *DS9*, "What You Leave Behind, Part 1," production number 575, original airdate: June 2, 1999; Ira Stephen Behr and Hana Beimer, *DS9*, "What You Leave Behind, Part 2," production number 576, original airdate: June 2, 1999.
25. Sergeant Robert L. Redwine, U.S. Marine Corps, interview by author, email, April 2000.
26. Craig Haney and John Manzolati, "Television Criminology: Network Illusions of Criminal Justice Realities," in *Readings about the Social Animal*, 6th ed., ed. Elliot Aronson (New York: W.H. Freeman and Company, 1973).

In the 7th grade, Wendy Green told her friend Scott to pick her Confirmation Name—Veronica or Felicity. Since Scott didn't believe Archie Andrews was ever a target of affection, he went with Felicity. Nearly 20 years later, there was a hot show on the WB of the same name, so he must have been spot on. Wendy Alicia Felicity Green Stengel now resides in Washington DC, where she spends her time ruing the day she ever let someone else decide something for her. Even if it was a nice name.

DVD Review: *The Incredibles, Two-Disc Collector's Edition*

By Alex Esten

This review is slightly older and less timely than I would have liked, but there are times when you don't have super speed, or the ability to slow down time. There are also moments when you wish you could just fly really fast opposite the rotation of the Earth to make sure you're able to do something you didn't have time to do earlier. Superman can do it. We can't. It's unfortunate we can't be superheroes, but when you consider it critically, being a superhero may be a pretty horrible thing. At least, it may not be as glamorous as we think it would be. Super strength, the power of flight, or radiation breath all sound incredibly cool, but if a superhero's life is anything like what we see in Pixar's recent movie, *The Incredibles*, we may start re-thinking that desire.

That's one of the beauties of a Pixar film. They can take something that seems so fantastic and outrageous and transform it into a concept that is totally believable and grounded in a matter-of-fact "This is how their universe works" reality. Whether their characters are a child's

playthings, neurotic insects, overwrought monsters, or absent-minded fish, all of them have a sincerity in their dialogue and reactions; because of this, Pixar films have been consistently better than any films from the competition. *The Incredibles* continues that tradition, and Pixar again proves they are the "top dogs" when it comes to this genre of entertainment.

In a genre that's become increasingly bloated lately because certain companies believe it to be hip to insert as many pop culture references as possible into a two-hour flick, I tend to view *The Incredibles* as Pixar's rebuttal to that trend. The film takes the genre back to its roots, where an emphasis on character development was key, and the pop-culture appearing throughout the film was largely based on either the characters themselves or the environment around those characters.

In *Toy Story*, for example, there were hokey references to childhood games like Battleship and toys such as Mr. Potato Head appeared as characters. *Toy Story 2* followed a similar principle.

Sharp-eyed audiences will spot a Super Nintendo in one of the opening scenes, and when Buzz & Co. trek into Al's Toy Barn, there are constant jabs at the entire Barbie franchise. Buzz himself is shocked by how the Buzz Lightyear action figures behave fresh out of their box. These witticisms work because those references and allusions make sense within the context of those films. It's perfectly reasonable to see Battleship, or have a character behave like a wallflower from another film, or to have a handful of characters playing a popular video game system—elements of a culture that is undoubtedly more child-like than adult—because the context of those films is child-like.

That is largely why movies like *Shrek*, while entertaining, are in fact detrimental to the genre. Because rather than have jokes about a lame fairytale contrivance, we're bombarded with Eddie Murphy singing a Willie Nelson tune, the medieval equivalent of fast-food drive-through, dated movie parodies of lackluster and lame Tom Cruise action/spy thrillers from the mid-90s, *Pork Illustrated*, a handful of medieval variations of mainstream and recognizable chains today, and many other distracting, forced and wholly unnecessary pop culture-isms. It's annoying, to be honest. Programming a "Sir Justin" poster in a bedroom is neither witty nor endearing; it's just horridly dating the film. In some ways, I think the annoyance is a specificity issue. Those pop culture-isms in *Shrek 2* are not timeless, and the jokes will become dated very quickly because they otherwise lack a foundation in the film, unlike the references in the *Toy Story* franchise. In twenty or thirty years from now, no-

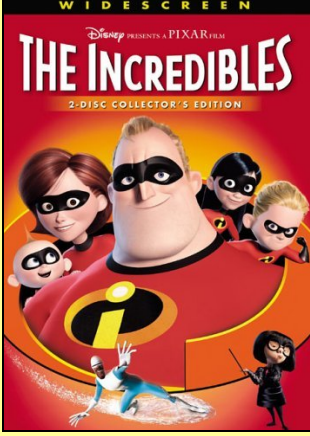
body will care who Justin Timberlake was, so that joke will be lost on all but a few.

I don't see this happening with *The Incredibles* and the majority of Pixar's film library, because many of the jokes in their films don't rely so heavily on external popular culture. In fact, much of the humor in Pixar films is derived from that matter-of-factly "This is how their universe works" approach, and *The Incredibles* is no different.

The film opens with a series of mockumentary-style interviews as Mr. Incredible, Elastigirl, and Frozone (voiced by Craig T. Nelson, Holly Hunter, and Samuel L. Jackson, respectively) give some insights into the quirks and tribulations of being a superhero. They offer their thoughts on having a secret identity, and apparently the necessity of having one isn't due to any safety concerns.

Mr. Incredible just can't believe anyone would want to be super all the time. Elastigirl couldn't go food-shopping as a superhero. Frozone isn't concerned with secret identities. He just plays it cool with the ladies, because he associates knowing a female superhero's secret identity as the first step in a relationship, rather than a working relationship. He's a "playa," so he can't be in a relationship like that. At times, Mr. Incredible feels like the maid, because the world "always manages to get

back in jeopardy again." He just cleaned that mess up, and sure enough, something else just went wrong. When asked if she would ever consider "settling down," Elastigirl will hear none of it; she explains that she's up there with the "big boys" now, and it's apparent from her response that leaving the men to save the world would



DVD Release Date: Mar., 2005
Starring: Craig T. Nelson, Holly Hunter, Samuel L. Jackson, Jason Lee, Dominique Lewis, Teddy Newton, Wallace Shawn
Director: Brad Bird
Screenwriter: Brad Bird
Rated: PG
Studio: Walt Disney Home Video
Special Features: Commentary by Brad Bird, producer John Walker & the animators; "Jack-Jack Attack" exclusive all new short film; "Incredibly-Blunders" bloopers and outtakes; deleted scenes, including alternate opening; making of *The Incredibles* featurette; seven additional behind-the-scenes featurettes; top secret NSA files on all the Supers; "Mr. Incredible & Pals" cartoon with optional commentary by Frozone and Mr. Incredible; "Vowellet" an essay by vocal talent Sarah Vowell (Violet); Introductions with Brad Bird.

conflict with her soft-Feminist ideals of female empowerment in the workplace.

Within those first ten minutes, the film already establishes two things. First, the main characters are portrayed as both superheroes and “normal” people who have normal anxieties and fears. This displays the matter-of-fact tone that makes Pixar films so delightful and intelligent. Second, the individual responses set-up the later irony after numerous lawsuits and public attacks force many superheroes into hiding. Mr. Incredible’s disbelief that anyone would want to be a superhero 24/7 is immediately contradicted, as he finds himself longing for the “glory days” after years of working



as cubicle gopher Bob Parr in an insurance firm, in a mundane, kitschy suburb straight out of the 50s. Elastigirl’s—rather, Helen Parr’s—soft-Feminism slowly but surely mellows as she falls in love with Mr. Incredible and they begin raising a family of superchildren. Frozone, now known only as Lucius Best, also begins married life, quite the radical change from his “playa” days.

Largely, it is these changes that propel the film forward. Bob and Lucius lie to their wives about Wednesday night poker games so they can sit in Bob’s car and listen to police scanners. When they hear about a building on fire downtown, they speed off into the night to rescue those trapped by the blaze, donning ski masks to disguise themselves, as their former superheroic counterparts are not supposed to exist anymore.

Incidentally, this scene presents an interesting duality and raises a fascinating question. After Bob and Lucius inadvertently bust through the wall into an adjoining jewelry store, still fully clad in the black jumpsuits and ski masks, the police officers on the scene reasonably believe they are there to steal. We see this and wonder what the differences between superheroes and supervillains are, and if there are any differences. Surely, there are distinct differences between motivations and ideologies, but even motivations can be misunderstood.

The only reason the police believe Bob and Lucius are robbing the jewelry store is due to the way Bob and Lucius are dressed. Had they worn Mr. Incredible and Frozone ensembles, the police would be thanking them for saving those people, very likely absolving them of any wrong-doing, and treating the broken wall as nothing to be worried about. If they were Mr. Incredible and Frozone, their motivations would never, ever have been called into question. They would be heroes.

But that doesn’t happen. Because the perceptions of the police officers are based only on what they can see at that point in time, what they *see* are two men dressed in ski masks who just broke into a jewelry shop. What does this say about the nature of superheroes and supervillains? Are the differences based solely on what style of costume one wears? Is one defined by what they wear, or is one defined by one’s character? These are a few of the questions that the film focuses on.

If superheroes and supervillains can be defined solely by what they wear, then the Parrs truly appear normal. But they are far from normal. With the transplant into suburbia, the Parrs are required to “fit in.” Helen has to constantly keep their son, Dash, in-check, because he knows what he is and wants to use his powers. Granted, he uses his powers to torment certain teachers at school, but this is only because there is no avenue for a positive use of his super speed. Dash’s appearance requires him to be normal. He looks like any other child in his class and yet he is exceedingly different, just like his entire family. Their suburbia life is in fact not a solution to the problem of their superheroics; it is only another costume they must wear.

The problem with those new costumes is that, like we see in the jewelry store scene, one cannot be defined by the outfit they wear, because of its superficiality—the costume is in essence a removable skin—it is easily replaced. Bob Parr goes from Mr. Incredible to a petty thief due to his attire.

This superficial perception applies to the villains of the film, as well. If it were not for Syndrome's violent philosophies and selfish ideologies, the public would view him as a superhero, because he wears the cape and tights commonly associated with superheroes. He appears in broad daylight, meaning the public can easily perceive him as having nothing to hide, even though they have never previously seen him until the end of the film.

Throughout the film, there is that constant interplay between appearance and reality. It may look like high-gloss children's entertainment, but you begin to think about certain elements of it and realize it's much deeper than the Shreks of the industry. *The Incredibles* works because we care about each and every one of the characters, even the villains, because each and every one of the characters is fully developed. There's character development to the extent that in the Special Features, we get to hear sound clips of twenty other superheroes not given screen-time, and they are just as human as the main cast. They all have personality quirks, fears, concerns, and even some border on sociopathic. Some are a psychologist's worst nightmare, again displaying Pixar's matter-of-fact approach.

Much like Pixar's previous works, *The Incredibles* has an extraordinary amount of depth to it. It's a film that stands up to any type of critical examination and comes out even stronger afterwards. Rarely do we expect a children's flick to raise and focus on issues about social perceptions. *Shrek* flirted with the topic, but lame popular culture seemed more important. *The Incredibles* is worth seeing.



This wasn't so much a review as an analysis, but that seems testament to how strong this film is. When a review can't avoid getting into the deeper social philosophies present in a work, you know that work must be very special. And *The*

Incredibles is a very special piece of filmmaking, with some rather... unexpected Special Features on the second disc.

The TOP SECRET category has probably the weirdest content I've seen in a while. When you access it, it goes through the expected security check mock-up animation, but the material is anything but expected. On the left, there's a very bad-looking animation still of a rabbit, Mr. Incredible, and Frozone titled "Mr. Incredible & Pals." In the center, there's that same image, but with Lucius and Bob sitting in front of it a la *Mystery Science Theatre 3000*, a hint at what the clip will be, if the "Commentary" title didn't give it away. On the right, you have "NSA FILES," which is equally disturbing in its own right.

I can say with confidence that only the most die-hard B-movie fans will be able to stomach "Mr. Incredible & Pals," because the animation is some of the worst I've ever seen. The mouths aren't even animated; a live actor's mouth is merely superimposed into them, using the technique seen in *Clutch Cargo*. The narration is overdone, as is the dialogue, and action is described, rather than shown. The "plot" is utterly contrived (a missing bridge!), and the villain of the piece

borders on mentally deficient. It's absolutely dreadful in every sense of the word, and it's likely that some B-movie fanatics may be appalled.

If you're unable to cope with the horror, the *MST3K*'d version of

it may be more agreeable to your sanity. Frozone's constant, scathing reactions throughout the cartoon make sitting through it much easier. The frankness and "in your face" tone of his comments have a very Samuel L. Jackson feel to them. Considering we never see that "black anger," as Jackson has called it in the past, in the actual film, it's nice to see the creative team of *The Incredibles* include this little Easter Egg. It definitely gives Frozone (and Jackson) a chance to go all-out like that, and it's certainly worth checking out.

That type of matter-of-fact humor also carries over into the NSA Files portion, which consists of about two dozen superhero biographies, most with audio interviews. It complements the main film very well, because it demonstrates how thorough Pixar and Brad Bird were in creating this universe. Each superhero there has a complete biography, history, personality descriptions, weaknesses, and so on. If they're particularly neurotic (and most of them are), their audio interview makes it obvious. Some of the interviews transcend conventional description, and must be experienced so the absurdity can be believed. It's wonderful to see that egotism and paranoia are staples of superheroism, and at the same time, scary, as well. That balance makes the film so delightful, because on one hand, there's this dark edge you're aware of, but on the other hand, the feel-good nature of the film acts as a counter to it.



Judging by the interviews and deleted scenes, *The Incredibles* was actually much darker and satirical than what we see in the final product. The original introduction in the film (included as animated storyboards) was much more visceral, as it opens at the prototypical neighborhood barbecue. Helen and Bob are the new parents on the block, as well as the new neighbors. Over the course of the scene, they're engaging in the usual chitchat and mingling, when one "powerwife" says something very derogatory about stay-at-home mothers. Helen, who left the superhero business to raise the family, grows rather furious with this woman, approaching her and striking up what would have become a seething catfight—that is, if Bob hadn't become distracted by the commotion and cut off his fingers. Of course, being Mr. Incredible, a superhero who is almost completely indestructible,

Bob is completely unharmed, but the butcher knife bends around his fingers, similar to a Looney Tunes gag involving Wile E. Coyote, an oil slick, and an Acme steel door. Bob pretends to be injured, and then Helen insists on driving him to the hospital, rather than their neighbors calling for an ambulance. As they're driving home, one neighbor finds the knife in the bushes in the next yard and makes a phone call to a very sinister voice.

Later that evening, a crash in the living room awakens Bob and Helen. Bob gets up, assures Helen he won't hurt the burglar too much this time, but noting he'll still try to enjoy it anyway. Much to his surprise, it isn't any ordinary burglar: it's Syndrome, his old arch-nemesis, returning to settle a few "open accounts." Syndrome's wrist-mounted beam weapon makes Bob and Helen completely useless, freezing them in the air. Then the baby cries.

It's almost a crime they altered the introduction, because I would have loved to feel this scene in its entirety, and Brad Bird would have, as well. He's a filmmaker who knows how to write dialogue, and his pacing is exceptionally well-planned. The rest of the deleted scenes are of the same caliber as this one, and as a whole, the "making of" documentaries, the deleted scenes, are an incredible supplement to the main film. If the main film isn't enough to warrant a purchase, the special features are equally stunning. Plus you get all sorts of concept art, publicity stills, collages; the *2-Disc Collector's Edition* is entirely worth it.

Alex Esten is a fourth-year English Major in the College of Arts & Sciences at Rutgers University-Camden.

Book Reviews: *You Bet Your Planet*, edited by Martin H. Greenberg & Brittany A. Koren & *ReVisions*, edited by Julie E. Czerneda & Isaac Szpindel

By Danny Adams

Everyone has heard the doom-filled fortune telling that science fiction is dying. The predictions are as cyclical (almost timed, it seems) as the peaks and dips in the sun's magnetic field. To this you can add the subset of anthologies, where the sales numbers make the case that even if they aren't dying, they're definitely struggling. They may indeed be a victim of their own success; like other fields of sf and fantasy, there are so many good works on the shelves it's impossible for most people to read them all, and a book that might otherwise become highly regarded in the field is held down by the weight of its neighbors.

You Bet Your Planet faces another strike against it, also not of its own doing, from the fact that it will inevitably suffer against comparisons. It invited authors to reveal their visions about the future of game shows, reality shows in particular—or ones perhaps going on right now elsewhere that only a few on Earth are aware of. This will almost certainly invite comparisons against other anthologies with “deeper” subject matter; comparisons against stories that, in some cases, may take themselves more seriously. This is unfair because ultimately these comparisons belong to the apples-and-oranges variety. Top-name talent and lesser-known authors alike contributed quality work, and the book succeeds in doing what it set out to do.

A more serious problem—once again, another barrier already well in place by the time *YBYP* was a glimmer in its editors' eyes—is the fact that the idea of game shows and recreation taken to their extremes is a well-used (well-worn?) idea in SF. America turning into a bread-and-circuses gladiatorial nation goes back to the Golden Age; more recently you have examples such as Stephen King's *The Running Man*. I went into the book

wondering if there could be anything new under this particular sun. And one does get the feeling that editors Martin Greenberg and Brittany Koren put the book together hoping to capitalize on the popularity of reality shows. But Greenberg's name on the cover may be enough to overcome readers' future-game-show-story ennui, and taken on their own merits the lion's share of the stories are quite good.

The collection gets off to a strong start with a piece by Esther Friesner—a name that should get any reader's attention—called “Cook's Turing”. The beginning of the story doesn't seem to be sure if it wants to be humorous or more serious; we discover that one representative from Earth (who has yet to be chosen) will decide whether our planet will stay free or be enslaved after a cooking contest. By the time of the contest itself, however, the story is firmly entrenched on the not-quite-serious side, and the satisfying conclusion falls squarely within the logic of humor. It also demonstrates that one key to success in an anthology such as this

one is not simply the shock value of how extreme we might become in pursuing entertainment, but rather that a great deal—personally or on a cosmic scale—depends on solving a puzzle.

Or a mystery. Jane Lindskold offers us “Here to There,” which not only throws the contestants a puzzle—they have no idea what they're supposed to do to win—but also a mystery. One of the contestants is a traitor who is willing to start a war that may destroy Earth, and two of the other contestants (including Lindskold's recurring character Captain Ah Lee) are plants intending to ferret the traitor out.

“You'd Better Win!,” by Josepha Sherman, demonstrates that personal stakes can mean every



bit as much to someone as a result that could shatter the world—and that not every group of contestants needs to compete (or fight) in order for everyone to win.

Despite what I said above, some of the stories are indeed demonstrations of extremes, or downright sinister. Mickey Zucker Reichert's "Heart's Desire" exemplifies both. In a future Western society grown decadent and lazy, broadcasters keep upping the stakes for an increasingly desensitized society until entertainment can prove lethal. Our protagonist, Carrington Arbuckle, longs for a job, which is rare in his era of leisure, and allows himself to be herded into a dangerous reality show in order to win one. The ending is gruesome but, I'll shamelessly admit, satisfying in an instant karma sort of way.

Overall there were really only two weak stories in the collection: "Mind Game" by Susan Schwartz, and "The Hollywood Dilemma" by Russell Davis. While the writing was fine, the tropes in the stories were unfortunately flat and familiar, the former showing us a miserable character who needs an alien to show her that there's no place like home, the latter a deal-with-The-Devil tale. While either plot device can be done well, the writing in the stories unfortunately wasn't up to the stories' lack of ingenuity, and I was disappointed that each story ended exactly as I figured they would as if on schedule.

If you're looking for cutting edge or intellectual SF, this book isn't the place—any more than you would find cutting edge or intellectual TV on most game shows. If you want light (and sometimes dark) entertainment, then *You Bet Your Planet* is worth turning off your TV for.

To recap my introduction, it's almost not fair to review *You Bet Your Planet* alongside *ReVisions*. While the former is confined to the realm of enter-

tainment, *ReVisions* is an anthology of alternate history that confines itself to nothing, and consistently provides more intellectual and thought-provoking stories by its very nature.

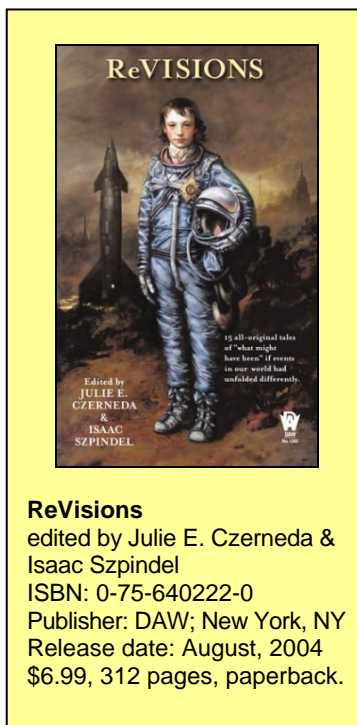
Again we find well-known authors—Geoffrey Landis, Mike Resnick, a Cory Doctorow and Charles Stross duet, along with one offering by editor Julie Czerneda—mixed with names who are lesser known but nevertheless turn in sterling performances.

The ideas are clever and unusual: James Alan Gardner gives us "Axial Axioms", in which great thinkers of ancient times such as Lao Tzu and Socrates turned their prolific brains to mathematics rather than just philosophy. Even for someone like me, whose math grades in high school still embarrass me when I think about them, Gardner's mix of mathematics and ancient philosophy was an intriguing whirlwind tour of possibilities.

More entries in the Strange Idea department include "Herd Mentality" by Jay Caselberg, in which a computer tech uncovers a worldwide plot by two hundred clones of Albert Einstein; "A Call From the Wild" by Dorrana Durgin, set in a modern era where dogs were never domesticated;

and Peter Watts' "A Word For Heathens", where religious fervor in ancient times was controlled by artificial means.

The aforementioned well-known names turned in ideas that were less bizarre, but no less thoughtful. Geoffrey Landis' "The Resonance of Light" opens the anthology with a story of how inventor Nikola Tesla plotted to stop what we now call World War I. "Silent Leonardo," by Kage Baker, explores what might have happened if some Renaissance warlord had put to use all of those out-of-time weapons Leonardo Da Vinci really did design. Julie Czerneda's "Out of China" explains how a Chinese scientist may have discovered the true source of the Black Plague two gen-



erations before it hit Europe—with oddly frustrating results for our own altered time. And the team of Doctorow and Stross points out that cheap cold fusion energy may not necessarily be a blessing for everyone in their “Swimming Upstream in the Wells of the Desert.”

I enjoyed this book so much that I’m reluctant to admit that not all of the stories’ endings are as strong as they could be—and in fact the conclusion of “The Resonance of Light” is uncomfortably similar to the ending of a classic story by Arthur C. Clarke. But the writing is invariably strong, engaging, and entertaining; the characterization is never two-dimensional; and the historical settings (or altered contemporary settings) never fail to come to life. In addition, the authors of each story offer a commentary afterwards delineating where and how their worlds broke away from ours. I was actually somewhat worried by the commentary idea—but happily they were educational rather than condescending. Better still, several spun off even more possibilities about how history could have diverged from our own.

ReVisions is a must read for anyone who doesn’t outright detest the genre of alternate his-

tory. From this reviewer’s point of view, alternate history never fails to be thought-provoking when done well, and *ReVisions* is overall an incredible piece of work. If you can’t find it in the bookstore—it may already be “history” in some places since it was released last year—then hop on your computer or phone and order it. You’ll find the collection time well spent.

*Danny Adams is a lifelong history geek who, alas, almost never watches game shows, and reality shows even more rarely. He is the co-author, with Philip Jose Farmer, of the recently completed short novel The City Beyond Play (which envisions future medieval re-enactors living within a realm of their own creation), and his short stories and poetry have appeared or are forthcoming in magazines such as Strange Horizons, Weird Tales, Mythic Delirium, Star*Line, Not One Of Us, Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine, Lone Star Stories, Illumen, Kenoma, and Abyss & Apex. He and his wife Laurie live on a college campus in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia along with four entertaining, engaging, and thought-provoking cats.*

Book Review: From Alien to The Matrix: Reading Science Fiction Film

by Roz Kaveney

By Edna Stumpf

There are those who read and argue about science fiction for years, and who likewise watch and argue about movies-plus-television, then rent the video, buy the DVDs and watch the extras. Track multiple Hollywood careers complete with scurrilous anecdotes. Pay attention to musical scores and special effects (FX) technology up to and including CGI. There are those who absorb all this lore, known as “pop culch,” and love it. They’re not tired or discouraged or embarrassed by their devotion to *Star Trek*.

They’re Geeks. And this book—whether or not they choose to read it—is for them. Kaveney states up front that she wishes to “valorize what we may proudly call the geek aesthetic.” If you are profoundly interested in the science fiction movies

she has culled for explication—starting with *Starship Troopers* and culminating in the progressively problematic *Alien* quartet—you will want to join her forced march through some damned close critical readings. You’ll learn a lot, which is the good news. I’ll put off the bad till later.

One warning: re-watch these films before you read. (It is a wonder of our age, Grasshoppers, that this is not only possible but no big deal—even taking into account the failings of Blockbuster.) Otherwise, the scene-by-scene descriptions of the really-too-long *Strange Days* will elude you. And you won’t have the opportunity to become, like me, a reluctant admirer of a movie I once wrote off as tacky mid-90s anti-millenarianism. Symbol-spotting can be exhilarating and artfulness should

be rewarded by the acknowledgement of art.

Also, you'll get to watch *Galaxy Quest* again and make family members watch it with you. *Alien Resurrection*—well, not fun. Kaveney doesn't like it much either.

We are free to accept or not the author's run-downs on films most of us have opinions about already. (Oh, you liked *Alien Resurrection*? How about *Matrix Revolutions*? You're kidding.) The real pleasure of the book is in recognizing concepts that had already been floating in our group subconscious. An example being "competence cascades:" "a process whereby a rare set of professional skills is admired and imitated by an amateur following and the professional and amateur worlds influence each other in a process of continuous feedback and change of roles until the professional skills are far more advanced and far less rare." Read it again. The geeks, by appreciating and imitating and refining the product, feed progress. Fans matter. And we knew that.

I also welcome her notion of a "thick text." This is demonstrated—I'll paraphrase—when you see in a movie, for instance, the contributions of the original novelist, multiple scriptwriters, FX guys, makeup gals and camerapeople. Then you consider the last-minute studio manipulations, the cast changes, the directorial sacrifices (which will be) recorded as outtakes on the Director's Cut DVD. You might give a thought to behind-the-scenes distractions and divorces. It is seeing the film in complex dimension, which technology enables us to do. We become geeks. We have tools with which to grip popular culture.

Roz Kaveney, between bursts of scholar-talk, reveals herself as a science fiction fan. She believes that a grounding in written sf is an advantage for the filmmaker. *Starship Troopers*, a boilerplate exercise in theoretically anti-fascist power worship, would have benefited had Verhoven actually read

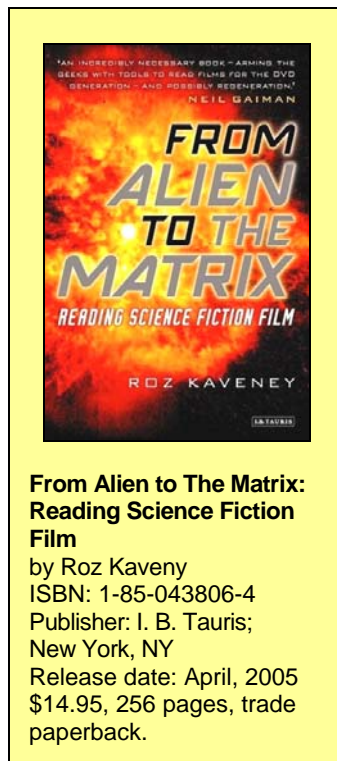
Robert A. Heinlein and noticed the subtleties of the work he set out to parody.

In an idea related to that of "competence cascades," Kaveney talks about "hinterland," progressively defined ideas that emerge from fictional "conversations" among genre writers. True originality is produced through tradition; those who know no history are destined to invent affectless gimmicks, which explains why James Cameron's *Terminator* films capture time paradox with such authority. Cameron, the sf buff, knew his predecessors; George Lucas, the toy maven, counted his cash and—figuring he didn't need influences and ignoring even his own earlier smart choices—proceeded to lead his franchise into an artistic dead end. No hinterland. "A one-man band has no collegiality."

Roz Kaveney has provocative opinions and good ideas. I actually hoped for more ideas, connected into a comprehensible pattern, applied consistently to her movie hit parade. (Her on-the-fly comments can kick off the argument reflex, as when she snubs Verhoven's *Total Recall* as a "thud and blunder" star vehicle. It wasn't faithful to the Philip K. Dick original. Gee. First time that's happened in Hollywood.)

If Kaveney has a critical system, it's buried in prose that is too densely packed for a layperson's excavation. Though she's not an academic, only a writer with one defiant eye on the Academy would persist with words like "metonymy," "ludic," and "luminous." We like pop culch, Ms. K.; no need to oversell. And I'll level with you: "trope" is a term that, no matter how often I check the dictionary, still manages to mush up the meaning of any context in which I find it.

In further bad news, the book is severely under-indexed. You might as well just stick with the table of contents. Basic cast-and-crew credits, vitally needed as we plumb the depth of discus-



**From Alien to The Matrix:
Reading Science Fiction
Film**

by Roz Kaveney
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Publisher: I. B. Tauris;
New York, NY
Release date: April, 2005
\$14.95, 256 pages, trade
paperback.

sions, are not clearly presented. They should have been. How can we deal with a thick text without the name of the Best Boy?

However, we need books like *From Alien to Matrix*, and we need more of them. Pop Culture is a powerful, mindless force; it wants your money and your life. What geeks are willing to love they had best try to understand. They—i.e., we—need

cerebral cortex stimulators.

Roz Kaveney is very stimulating.

Edna Stumpf was a regular Philadelphia Inquirer book reviewer for over 25 years, often writing about science fiction. She also guest-lectured for science fiction film courses.

DVD Review: *Dr. Strangelove, 40th Anniversary Special Edition*

By **Richard Fuller**

Why do we have a *40th Anniversary Special Edition* of the 1964 black-and-white movie *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*?

Because of North Korea and Iran?

Because the picture links the oddest of couples, Black Comedy and social criticism, and is still darkly relevant?

Because of two of the more memorable lines in the history of talking pictures? "You can't fight in here! This is the War Room!"

Because it was co-written and directed by Stanley Kubrick, a quirky obsessive who's considered one of the medium's icons?

Consider it a crazyquilt masterwork—created in a metaphorical loony asylum, a.k.a. Planet Earth—by that suicidal species *Homo sapiens*. A crazyquilt is assembled from very different pieces, in this case, some of them badly chosen, others wonderfully selected. But it does ultimately cohere, if crazily, into a 94-plus minute picture, obeying the first law of funny: be brief...

Those who know only the onscreen Black Comedy version may be surprised that Kubrick originally intended to base his picture on a serious novel, about an American nuclear attack on Russia, called *Red Alert* by Peter George. But when Kubrick started working on the screenplay, he saw

constant humor in the nuclear/nooky situation.

A screenplay is a kind of blueprint and often very different than the film version. Sequences on the page are often shifted elsewhere in the picture. *Strangelove's* first screenplay scene begins inside a B-90 Sting Ray Bomber, called the "Leper Colony," that left Burpleson Air Force Base 14 hours ago. The plane carries 50 megatons, we're told, which is 15 times greater than the bomb dropped on Hiroshima.

Then we're inside the plane where Major "King" Kong looks at the nude Miss Milky Way in the magazine "Plaything." (There are two women in the screenplay but only one

in the movie, called Miss Foreign Affairs, who also poses, mostly nude, in the magazine *Playboy*.) The script includes dialogue from the movie, as we meet the ethnically mixed crew, but also a lot of dialogue that was cut.

Worse than the endless dialogue, Kubrick realized, is that this scene is the wrong beginning for a movie about the nuking of Planet Earth caused by a madman. The movie's first sequence begins inside Burpleson Air Force Base after we've seen a plane take off. RAF officer Group Capt. Mandrake gets a phone call. It's his boss, General Jack D. Ripper, who tells him the base is on Red Alert. We're about three minutes, forty-eight seconds into the picture when we first see Ripper and his



huge, phallic cigar, the former acted by Sterling Hayden.

The screenplay claims the “story will be played for realistic comedy... The acting will never be so-called ‘comedy’ acting.”

There isn’t a comic bone in Sterling Hayden’s entire body of acting. He’s chillingly real and doesn’t understand he’s nuts as he sends his planes off to nuke Russia because the Russians have poisoned our water with fluoridation (that isn’t in the screenplay). He also denies women his bodily “essence,” instead sucking those Freudian cigars. (Neither is mentioned in the screenplay.)

Hayden’s realistic performance is the spine that makes this picture stand—also standing the test of time—and ultimately “work” as Black Comedy. You laugh, nervously, at the funny, wannabe funny and unfunny performances because you really believe the world is coming to an end by way of the truly insane General Jack D. Ripper.

Unfunny performance? When George C. Scott falls and rolls across the floor and then back up like a nutty acrobat. Realistic comedy? Silent movie clowning. Kubrick encouraged Scott to do a final take for each scene and go over the top. Kubrick included those takes in the picture. When an actor gives a poor performance, blame the director.

Who do we blame—co-writers Kubrick or Terry Southern—for the movie’s most unfunny role? Keenan Wynn stares at RAF officer Mandrake’s uniform and says, “I think you’re some kind of deviated prevert.” (That line isn’t in the screenplay I read.) Many people

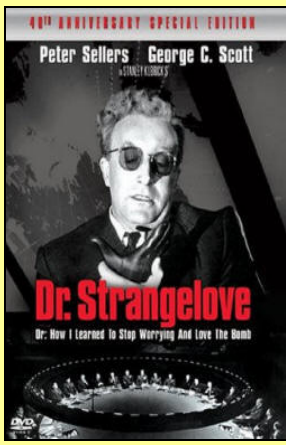
laughed at “prevert.” I didn’t. The Wynn character seems like a retard who has wandered in from another movie.

On the matter of goofy words, the screenplay’s list of names includes General “Buck” Schmuck, Admiral Percy Buldike and presidential aides Frankenstein, Von Klutz, Didley, Crudley and Turgidson. (That last name was of course substituted for Schmuck in the movie.) Realistic? Comic? Like 12-year-old boys telling poop jokes.

Consider those names and Wynn’s character tattered pieces on the crazyquilt. The most memorable piece—well, three pieces in fact—is Peter Sellers’ trio of screen performances. (Sellers was also supposed to play “King” Kong. An accident resulted in Slim Pickens being cast. Consider it a masterly accident. Pickens is funny without trying to be funny.) An actor’s voice is usually considered his most important “instrument.” Hayden’s, Scott’s, Wynn’s and especially Slim Pickens’ voices always sound the same. If used in an animation picture, their voices would be immediately identified.

In one of the Special Edition’s five documentaries, “Best Sellers or: Peter Sellers and Dr. Strangelove,” you see Groucho Marx and hear his unmistakable voice. I did a triple take—and rewound the DVD—when I realized Groucho was Sellers. Peter Sellers said he had no personality. He was the people he performed. Okay. Another nut involved in a movie about madness. When Sellers does

different accents in one of the DVD extras, you realize a truly great actor not only plays many different characters but also “plays” different voices. Sellers



DVD Release Date: Nov., 2004
Starring: Peter Sellers, George C. Scott, Sterling Hayden, Keenan Wynn, Slim Pickens, Peter Bull, James Earl Jones
Director: Stanley Kubrick
Screenwriters: Peter George & Stanley Kubrick
Rated: PG
Studio: Columbia Tristar Home Video
Special Features: “No Fighting in the War Room or: Dr. Strangelove and the Nuclear Threat,” new documentary including interviews with Bob Woodward, Robert McNamara, Roger Ebert, and Spike Lee; “Best Sellers: Peter Sellers Remembered” featurette; Interview with Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense under President Johnson; Collectible scrapbook with original production photos and an essay written by Roger Ebert; “The Art of Stanley Kubrick: From Short Films to Strangelove” featurette; “Inside the Making of Dr. Strangelove” featurette; Original Split-Screen Interview with Peter Sellers and George C. Scott; Original advertising Gallery.

was one of the greatest actors in the history of acting. Hadyn's chilling madman gets this quirky movie airborne. Sellers' three chameleon performances—as an RAF officer, President of the United States and former Nazi now called Dr. Strangelove—make it a crazyquilt masterwork.

Although nominated for an Academy Award Best Actor, Sellers lost to Rex Harrison in that photographed stage work *My Fair Lady*. Geoffrey Rush recently won an Emmy for the HBO movie *The Life and Death of Peter Sellers*.

If audiences were seeing this movie for the first time and knew nothing about Sellers three performances, would they notice that the same actor was playing them? I often ask fellow moviegoers, as we leave a theater, what they thought of the music. Too often, they wonder, "What music?" Almost no one pays any attention to a film's opening credits, except for the lead actors' names. No one knows what an art director or film editor does. The first time I watched a film editor at work, I realized how little I knew about this collaborative medium that depends on many people to complete a picture.

When done well, the DVD extras inform us what the non-actors mentioned in the opening credits do. Strangelove's unique opening credits by Pablo Ferro are handwritten, filling the screen but allowing you to see through them, watching one airplane refuel another while hearing the music "Try a Little Tenderness." The sequence is a comic form of sexual intercourse. At the film's end, the impregnated plane gives birth to a nuclear bomb, "life" ironically ending life. Someone points out to brilliant Pablo that instead of writing "based" on the novel *Red Alert*, he wrote "base." Convince me any moviegoer would notice. I didn't until watching that DVD documentary.

Another genius who worked on this mad movie is Ken Adams, who designed the War Room... Twice for impossible-to-satisfy madman

Kubrick. Once you've spent time in that uniquely designed space, you're visually imprinted with it for life. When Ronald Reagan was first elected president, he asked to be taken to that room. Alas, he wasn't taken to a rubber room instead.

Unfortunately, we get no footage of Kubrick talking about this quirky gem, his second best film after the landmark *2001*. We just get haunting stills of him, many redundantly repeated in the different documentaries.



The most relevant documentary is a 24-plus minute "talking head" interview with Robert McNamara, who was Secretary of Defense from 1961 to 1968. Those were probably the most agonizing years for America since the Civil War. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, I went to our personal library and picked the last book I'd ever read because I knew, in a day or so, the East Coast would be nuked. It was *Bread and Wine* by Ignazio Silone.

McNamara talks about that Crisis and how fallible human beings are. "We've got to get rid of nuclear weapons," he says, adding the obvious: "I think we live in a very dangerous time."

It's miraculous that we still have we, as well as this movie warning us about our own madness. Will we make it to a 50th Anniversary Special Edition of this crazyquilt picture? Or will international loonies, a.k.a. terrorists, get hold of devices to nuke the planet, claiming an ethnic religion as reason for mass nuclear murder?

In that case, the title would have to be Rev. Strangelove and the closing music would be...

Worse than the endless dialogue.

Richard Fuller was Philadelphia Magazine's film critic for over twenty years. He was The Philadelphia Inquirer's book columnist and reviewer for over thirty years. He also taught film and review-writing courses at several universities.

DVD Review: *Constantine* Two-Disc Deluxe Edition

By Christopher Garcia

"Hey, you hear they're making a Hellblazer movie?"

"No way, who's playing John Constantine?"

"Keanu Reeves."

"Oh."

That was the first time I had heard that they had brought on Keanu to play one of the greatest comic book characters of all time. I was quite bothered to learn this, so bothered in fact that I didn't see it in the theatres. For me to pass up a movie made from a comic book, a Vertigo comic book in fact, is a massive testament to how unhappy I was with this casting.

And now, I almost regret it.

The DVD for *Constantine* is good, though the film has some serious flaws, the extra materials and short documentaries make it a worthwhile view. You kinda have to come to it, you can't force *Constantine* on yourself or you'll only regret it. It has to be organic, and that's not to say herbal. It has to arise from a stillness.

Constantine is the story of John Constantine, a sort of Private Investigator who works to balance the powers of good and evil...well, sort of. It's hard to explain what he is, though we're led to believe that he's fighting for the forces of good in a war that seems to have more battles won by evil.

What's odd is that he was thrown into the battle unwittingly when he tried to commit suicide years earlier. He was yanked from hell and ended up on Earth with the unusual ability to see demons and

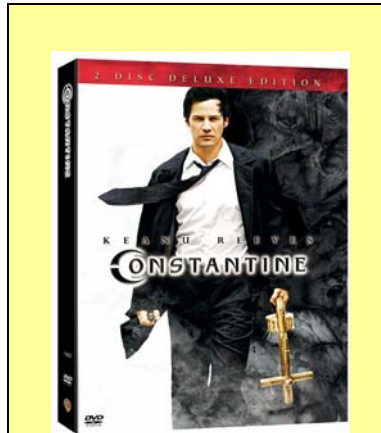
other strange afflictions. He also took up smoking. Almost at the first shot we learn that John is dying from lung cancer and has at most six months to live. This is how we start our adventure.

The performance of Reeves in this film is monotone and morose, as he even delivers the dry comedic lines with almost no inflection. It works in those rare moments where you want a character to react and he simply refuses to give in. At other points, it drags us down, slows the progress of the film.

The story unfolds and we find a police detective, played by the lovely Rachel Weisz, whose sister has committed suicide... or so it would appear. Constantine is brought in and brings the detective with him on a strange adventure that takes them across planes of reality and into parts of the underworld. It's an odd performance from the typically reliable Weisz, though she didn't have much to work with as far as the script goes.

There are some fantastic performances mixed in with the weak. Peter Stormare, best known for films like *Fargo* and *The Big Lebowski*, is excellent as Satan, though it's merely a cameo. Tilda Swinton, an amazing British actress who made the movie *Orlando* watchable, goes well beyond all expectations and delivers as

the archangel Gabriel. She's amazing at points as a sort of ambiguous character who you know is working both sides of the net, though you're not sure how or why.



DVD Release Date: July, 2005

Starring: Keanu Reeves, Rachel Weisz, Shia LeBeouf, Tilda Swinton, Djimon Hounsou

Director: Francis Lawrence

Screenwriters: Kevin Brodbin & Frank A. Cappello

Rated: R

Studio: Columbia Tristar Home Video

Special Features: Commentary by Francis Lawrence, producer Akiva Goldsman, and Kevin Brodbin and Frank Cappello; "Passive" music video; Theatrical trailers; 18 Minutes of deleted scenes, including alternate ending; "Conjuring Constantine" featurette; "The Production from Hell" documentary gallery; "Imagining the Underworld" documentary gallery; "Constantine Cosmology" featurette; "Foresight: the Power of Previsualization" featurette; Exclusive collectible *Hellblazer* comic book featuring a reprint of issue #41 "Dangerous Habits" and a *Hellblazer* short story.

The effects range from sloppy to magnificent. There's a guy made up of hundreds of animals that is a wonderful effect. The shots in Hell aren't fully-realised and weaken that portion of the film. There are nice bits of CGI here and there, but at times it seems that they are simply trying to lay a tarp over the script and hope no one notices.

It's a fun film that I admit I enjoyed enough to say that I'd watch it again if it were on while I was stuck in my hotel for an evening, but the DVD extras are really something to talk about.

There are about 10 different mini-documentaries on the making and meaning of the film. The first delves into the history of the Constantine character and the way in which it made its way to the screen. The talk of the director plus various people involved in the making of the comic and the film make you quickly realize that the folks you really want to hear from, Alan Moore and Jamie Delano, the two who had so much to do with the creation of and continuation of, John Constantine. The looks at the effects are even more interesting. They spend a lot of time with specific effects explaining how they were

made and what it took. There are moments in the documentaries when you realize that they had to play it the way they did, like when they claim that Keanu nailed the role of Constantine, but mostly it comes across as sincere. The little documentaries make the film seem better, as if you can kind of gloss over more flaws in favor of the backend.

So, as a movie, Constantine isn't great. It's a piece of work that fails in some areas and achieves some in others, but mostly, it's just a decent tale with a few problems. The DVD is worth buying if you really want to understand the process and are interested in seeing what goes into making the modern film. I'd recommend starting with the extras and then going to the movie, because it'll give you a basis to hang your viewing and may well keep you from noticing the bigger mistakes.

Christopher J. Garcia edits The Drink Tank on eFanzines.com and is a writer, filmmaker and historian from San Jose, CA. He has had work appear a bunch of places a bunch of times and he is damn proud of it.

Book Review: *City of Pearl*, by Karen Traviss

By *Matthew Appleton*

Sad to say, but it doesn't take much for a really good book to escape my attention these days. With a child, everyday life and a wide array of other interests all competing for my time and attention, I can't even manage reading all of the Nebula and Hugo Best Novel nominees in a given year. However, I do watch all the various year's best lists, award short lists and the annual *Locus* Reader's Poll to see if something interesting as flown in under my radar. When I noticed Karen Traviss' debut novel, *City of Pearl*, getting attention from the *Locus* Readers Poll and the Campbell Award judges, I traipsed down to the local Borders and picked up a copy.

I was wowed.

The primary plotline of the novel couldn't be simpler. Shan Frankland, an Environmental Enforcement Office for the Federal European Union,

receives orders to lead an expedition out to Cavanaugh's Star to contact a human colony that settled there 200 years previously. Most of the information given to her before taking the journey is buried under the guise of a Suppressed Briefing, which ensures that the person with the knowledge isn't able to access or use it until it becomes necessary. When she arrives—along with a small military unit and a handful of scientists aboard their spaceship, the *Thetis*—she eventually ascertains she needs to get access to the gene bank the colonists originally brought from Earth as many of the coded specimens—especially food crops—are now extinct back on Terra.

As Shan learns more about Bezer'ji—the name used by a couple of the planet's existing sentient lifeforms, the Bezeri and Wess'har and by the human colonists—she learns that the situation is

amazingly complicated. Aside from the aforementioned species, a third, the Isenj, has also made territorial claims upon the planet. An incredibly uneasy peace exists—in fact, the Isenj continue to find a way to press their claims on the planet—and a former Wess’har super-soldier, Aras, patrols the planet to make sure that no one upsets the fragile balance of life on the planet. It turns out the human colony exists mostly below ground and subsists on a vegan diet at the request of the Wess’ar, whose presence on the planet is solely to provide defense for the Bezeri, who live in the oceans. As part of their philosophy on how to best defend the Bezeri, the Wess’ar try to ensure that the human colony disturbs as little as possible the delicate balance of the planet’s ecosystem, hence the reason why they exist almost entirely underground.

With such a tangled situation, Traviss easily could’ve written a very plot-heavy novel which relies solely on the interaction between the many species and the different factions of humans. Instead, she spends a lot of time tackling the issues and behind-the-scenes machinations that drive the events on Bezer’ej. Along the way, she either touches upon or explores issues such as environmental protection, reproductive rights, justice, terrorism, longevity, animal rights, religion, politics, power and responsibility, embedded journalists and informational sources.

Frequently, one character becomes a center for more than one of these issues. For example, Eddie Michallat, the journalist accompanying the *Thetis* on its mission to Bezer’ej, quickly decides that Shan is actually acting in the best interests of the ship’s crew, no matter how much they dislike and/or disagree with her orders. In fact, he becomes so opinionated in the matter that he actually spends time making arguments on her behalf rather than maintain the thin veil of objectivity he normally works under. Later, once the situation on

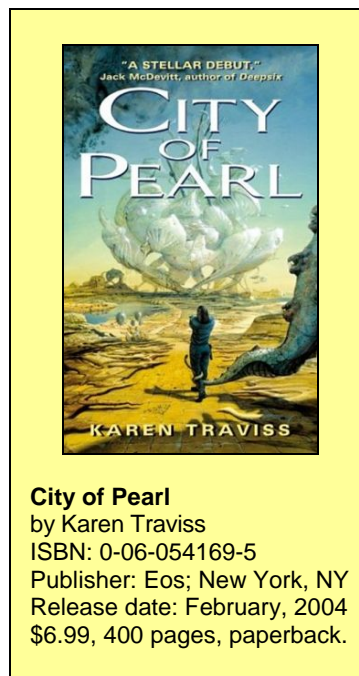
Bezer’ej reaches its crisis point, Eddie actually keeps information Shan divulged to him confidential, rather than report it—even though she made no request for it to remain off the record.

However, the most intriguing aspect of the book regards the relationship between Shan and Aras. Despite coming from different species, Shan and Aras have more far more in common than many married couples. They both serve as enforcers—before the mission, Shan served as an officer enforcing environmental law—and they are highly principled, to a point where it becomes self-detrimental. For instance, Aras refuses to touch anyone out of the fear of giving a virus he carries—

one that makes him a virtually immortal super-soldier—even though he yearns for such physical contact, and for good reason as the consequences of infecting humankind are potentially quite severe. In a similar fashion, earlier in her career Shan ultimately received a demotion for refusing to follow through on a terrorism investigation because she felt that the “terrorists” hadn’t actually committed a crime, even though her superiors wanted them caught no matter what. In both instances, they inflict self-suffering out of a notion of doing what’s right for the greater good.

Traviss employs another nice touch in the way she handles relativity. The *Thetis* does not rely on

hyperspace, wormholes, warp drive, instantaneous communication or anything of the sort, so it takes 75 years for the crew to arrive at Bezer’ej. As a result, Shan and the rest of the ship are effectively cut off from Earth and must make by themselves all the decisions on how to handle the situation. Because he’s the only reporter on the planet sending dispatches back to Earth, Eddie uses the time delay to better tailor and focus his reports, as well as makes editorial judgments he normally wouldn’t have made on Earth. When a newer, faster ship arrives from Earth without warning less than a year after their arrival, it turns every-



thing on end—especially in regards to the Isenj, who possess instantaneous subspace communication, have passed the technology on to the arriving ship, and have started a disinformation campaign to draw humanity to their side in an attempt to engage the Wess’har militarily once again.

At the end of the novel, Traviss does an admirable job of wrapping up the major plotlines of the book. However, *City of Pearl* is clearly the beginning of a series, and sure enough, since it’s release, a sequel, *Crossing the Line*, arrived on shelves, and a third novel, tentatively titled *The World Before*, is currently scheduled for a November release. In addition, the August issue of *Locus* states that Traviss has signed a deal with Eos to write three more Wess’har novels. While *City of Pearl* ends in a manner allowing for all these sequels—but still manages to resolve most of the primary plotlines

introduced within—I wonder how Traviss will manage to advance the story for so many volumes and continue to delve into so many issues with a continually fresh perspective.

Nonetheless, I cannot recall the last time I encountered a first novel that impressed me so much. (Just to give you, the reader, a point of reference, I was 12 when *Neuromancer* hit the stores.) With the exception of romance, there’s a little of everything in here for sf readers of all stripes. *City of Pearl* stands as an auspicious start for Traviss’s career as a sf novelist. Hopefully, she will continue to dazzle in future volumes.

Matthew Appleton is the Editor of Some Fantastic and plans on reading at least the next novel in the Wess’har series.

DVD Review: Code 46

By Caroline-Isabelle Caron

Code 46 is a disturbing little movie. This 2003 low-budget UK flick had no blockbuster aspirations whatsoever. Its DVD release has no grand aspirations either. The movie is unusual in that it is a rare example of a near-future film where the world created is eminently plausible and the plot is almost secondary to the message. It is in fact quite unsettling how shockingly real everything feels in *Code 46*. Michael Winterbottom (*24-Hour Party People*) and regular writing partner Frank Cottrell Boyce have crafted a unique movie that offers the audience a chilling vision of a future they are too likely to see.

Told in flashback narration, *Code 46* offers a very plausible view of a world where globalization has taken its course, where humans from all cultures and ethnicities have spread all over the globe. Ethnicities have merged. Languages have melded. The English spoken as a new *lingua franca* has adopted Spanish, Arabic, and Mandarin words, and neologisms identify new objects and realities. In this near-future, China is fully integrated into the world market. Immigration has been privatized and is in the hands of transna-

tional corporations. Insurance companies, such as Sphinx, issue travel papers—a fusion of biometric I.D., insurance card and passport called a *papelle*. William Geld (Tim Robbins) is a Seattle investigator who travels to Shanghai to investigate a case of fraudulent *papelles* at Sphinx. The perpetrator is the mysterious and beautiful Maria Gonzalez (Samantha Morton). William, who has taken an empathy virus, instantly falls in love with her. She believes he is her destiny. Maria is a siren, stirring William to find a way to freedom from his comfortable, programmed life.

Theirs is a world where the free flow of genetic information and genetic material, where the deregularization of assisted reproduction, have led to strict restrictions on liaisons between closely genetically related individuals, the eponymous code of the title. In this world, the haves and have-nots live apart, the former on the *Inside*, in beautiful ordered cities of glass and steel, the latter on the *Outside*, in scorched deserts and free ports. Though free, these places are chaotic, fantastical and dangerous, without order. Without a *papelle*, there is no traveling; there is no escaping these deserts.

One's genetic code determines if one can get these documents. The fortunate live at night, to escape from the sun and the pollution of the day, giving the movie a fractured look: city scenes are blue, desert scenes are ochre.

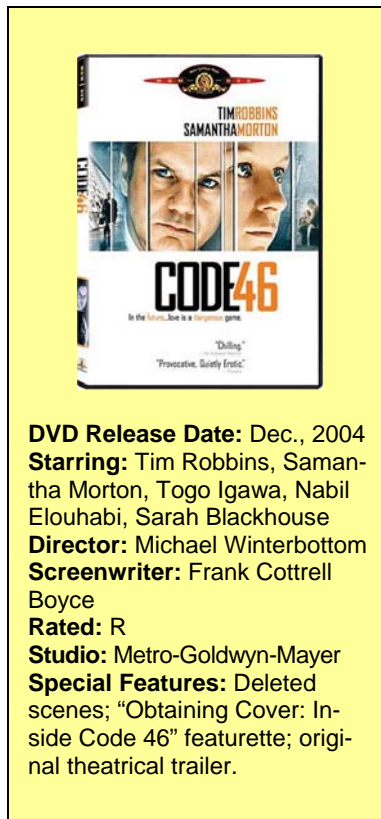
William and Maria's love affair initially lasts the duration of his papelle, 24 hours. When he returns home to his bland wife and son (his *chico*), he decides to return to Shanghai, only to discover that Maria has forgotten all about him. She had been pregnant and it was a Code 46 violation. In a strange Oedipus twist, William discovers that Maria is his genetic mother's genetic twin, one of several cloned embryos implanted around the world. A conception by them is a crime. Still, Maria falls in love with him a second time. They escape to a free port of the United Arab Emirates. But their love affair is doomed and they will face exile from their dreams.

Ultimately, *Code 46* is a reflection about the fatality of life in that future society. There is no escaping one's genetic destiny. *Gattaca* touched on the same topic to support free will, but *Code 46* is more fatalistic. Though one character states: "We aren't prisoners of our genes," the movie proceeds to show that the reverse here is true. The purchaser of a fraudulent papelle wants to study rare bats in India. Yet, he dies of a hemorrhagic disease he had no immunity for; Sphinx had refused him a papelle, because "Sphinx does not make a mistake." His genetic destiny was to die if he crossed the line to follow his life-long aspiration. Even William and Maria's love, though destined to occur, is also destined to fail. Maria has dreamed of meeting him since puberty. A sort of *appel du sang* drew him to her, but they cannot love as it is against the law. No matter how much they try changing it, they can not escape their destiny. In the end,

they cannot even know each other because they are too genetically close.

This makes *Code 46* a very disturbing reflection on the ethics of human control. Here, free will is negated by faceless, impersonal super-structures. Humans can extend their natural gifts with designer viruses. William takes the empathy virus. Maria tells the story of her taking of a Mandarin virus. The Chinese around her could understand her, but she could not! If these two viruses were taken willingly, both characters are subjected to a memory wipe virus. Maria's in particular makes her experience great pain when she and William resume their sexual relationship. She has to allow William to rape her, for all intents and purposes, in order for her to overcome her virus. In a world such as theirs, there is no need for armed repression and violent dictatorships to keep order: viruses and papelles do it seamlessly. Can one program another human being? If one can be enhanced with a simple virus, what makes a human, human? Winterbottom and Boyce intentionally provide no answer, no judgment. Viewers are left to figure it out for themselves.

The DVD extras do not help much either. Clearly MGM did not know how to market this movie. Whereas *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* was lavishly packaged, the *Code 46* DVD suffers from a definitively underwhelming release. The menus and special features are minimal (one would think it was a late 1990s release...). They include only four deleted scenes that provide nothing to the plot. The American theatrical trailer is pompous at best and largely explains the low box office returns the movie experienced in the US. With the exception of one featurette, all the other extras are trailers and infomercials for other MGM sci-fi releases, all of them bad, notably *Species III*. It goes without saying that *Code 46* is of an entirely



DVD Release Date: Dec., 2004
Starring: Tim Robbins, Samantha Morton, Togo Igawa, Nabil Elouhabi, Sarah Blackhouse
Director: Michael Winterbottom
Screenwriter: Frank Cottrell Boyce
Rated: R
Studio: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer
Special Features: Deleted scenes; "Obtaining Cover: Inside Code 46" featurette; original theatrical trailer.

other caliber than such B movies. Yet, MGM thought is appropriate to promote them here together. Not a good move.

“Obtaining Cover: Inside *Code 46*” mostly speaks of the original concept of the story, how Winterbottom and Boyce work together and how they managed to make such an interesting movie, with little budget and a small crew. Tim Robbins and Samantha Morton speak of their filming experience; though this viewer was distracted by her unspeakably ugly sunglasses and dress (she should be fined). In the end, though, even this 16-minute featurette is not enough to sustain such a

provocative film. It stands alone in such a mismatched package. *Code 46* is a must-see movie, but probably not a must-see again. It is in fact difficult to watch a second time as one knows what will happen. This makes *Code 46* literally a tragedy: no one escapes one’s destiny and the ending, though not sad, is nevertheless predetermined from the onset.

Caroline-Isabelle Caron is an Assistant Professor at the Department of History at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario. Her research focuses on North American popular culture, primarily among French-speakers.

Another Look at *Code 46*

By *Jessica Darago*

Set in a dystopian near-future that borrows from Golden Age writers such as Robert Heinlein, Philip K. Dick, and...yeah, Robert Heinlein again, *Code 46* is meant to be the kind of movie real sf aficionados (like, the ones who call it “sf” and scowl at the term “sci-fi”) live for. It wants to be mentioned in the same sentence as *Blade Runner*, *Gattica*, and *Dark City*. It wants to be like *Solaris*, perhaps a little too much like *Solaris*. At its heart, *Code 46* is what the best sf always is: a story about character and how the human heart and mind interact with technology, not about the technology itself.



I really wanted to like this movie.

No, really, I did.

It took a glass of good sherry and some deep-fried potatoes with unusual cheeses upon them to put my finger on just what, specifically, bugged. There were some obvious buggy bits (*cough, Oedipal-rape, cough*), but the entire theme of the movie was the elevation of *Twoo Wuv* over the Evil Structures of Society, and why and how that elevation failed is why and how the movie bugged.

Tim Robbins plays William, a sort of insurance investigator sent to Singapore to look into the theft of

“papelles,” a type of visa that is very hard to come by and without which you cannot leave or enter a city, much less a nation. The papelles are tightly controlled and restricted by a loosely sketched world government that approves them and the Sphinx Corporation that prints them. William has been hired by The Sphinx to root out the criminals.

As William is driven from the airport through a desert into the city itself, we learn just about all we need to know about this Earth: the ozone is gone; those who live Outside [of a city] want desperately to get in; those who live in the cities tell themselves that those who are Outside are Outside for a reason and feel protective of their good fortune. There’s also some frilly bits thrown in for good measure: VR goggles, photosensitive window glass, thumbprint locks, but most of that is window dressing. Class struggle is the writer’s theme here. Too bad he doesn’t know how he feels about it.

Inside the city, William meets and is instantly attracted to Maria Gonzolez (played by Samantha Morton and her acne). But this movie is also a romance; therefore, Maria is also the thief. William knows it, because he has taken an “Empathy Virus” that enables him to not so much read minds

as “feel what [others] are feeling.” So, with what seems like very little regret, he condemns another of her co-workers to the Outside and sets about seducing Maria.

Disaster ensues.

As it turns out, Maria and William are both clones raised by “nurture parents” and, unbeknownst to them, have a genetic relationship that constitutes a breach of Code 46, the law that governs who can breed with whom. (Again, as in most romances, a single sexual encounter is all it takes to make a baby. Is latex unavailable in the future? Has Ortho Tri-Cyclen disappeared from the earth?) The rest of the movie follows William’s desperate maneuvers (and Maria’s annoying, condescending, and unnecessary voiceover) as the couple tries to stay together and hide from the law.

Sounds romantic, in a disturbingly Heinleinian way, don’t it?

Too bad Maria’s had a memory wipe that renders her ignorant of the implications of her decisions. Too bad William knows this and doesn’t fill her in. Too bad we hate William for his selfish, careless handling of the entire situation and kind of hate Maria for being such a spineless, histrionic drama queen. The film fails at its very core, because in the end we cannot like these people. We are supposed to feel for the star-crossed lovers whose choices are taken away by Big Evil Government, but they did have choices, at least William did, and they consistently made bad ones. Their predicament is as much their own fault as that of some external menace.

Perhaps that’s the message. Perhaps we were supposed to “realize” that William was corrupted to the core by his class superiority and Maria was supposed to be the helpless planet Earth/feminine principal/exploited working class/[insert condescending stereotype about women here] destroyed by human greed. But if that’s the case, then we don’t hate William enough, and once again the movie fails in its objectives.

That’s the philosophical problem with the movie. On an artistic level, the film mostly works. Stripping out the voiceovers would be a good idea. I could’ve done with less “Whee! Look-it how freaky!” camera-work. There’s a scene in a nightclub that should carry a warning for epileptics.

On the other hand, despite my above dig, I actually like the fact that Maria looks like a normal girl and not some screen goddess. Many aspects of this world are presented elegantly and with a minimum of anvil dropping—the use of viruses to enhance human ability, the mishmash of English, French, Spanish, and Chinese that most people speak (thanks again, RAH). I like that the technology is necessary for the story without being the point of the story. And I think the world the writer and director created strikes the correct balance of familiar and uncanny to be a believable future.

But, dude, the characters. The characters! Ugh. So close and yet so, so far.

Jessica Darago spends 40 hours of her week trying to make science—and scientists—make sense, but she prefers the fictional variety of both.

Goats: The Comic Strip by Jonathan Rosenberg



goats: the comic strip jan. 30, 2004 <http://www.goats.com> jon@goats.com ©2004 jonathan rosenberg. all rights reserved

Surveying the Carnage: The 100 Years War Between Mars & Earth

By Matthew Appleton

This is the second part of a two-part article examining H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* and subsequent adaptations, tributes & works inspired by it.

VI. H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*, written, directed and produced by David Michael Latt (2005)

Anytime you have a DVD cover that borrows liberally from an *Independence Day* promotional poster, you know that you're headed for an awful film. In fact, this production single-handedly cemented Appleton's Second Law of Bad Movies: if you see boobies in the first 30 seconds of the film, and it is neither an adult feature nor explicitly about sex and/or the human body, chances are that the nipples are being used to distract you from the trainwreck you are about to witness. Sorry for the slightly juvenile wording, but there really is no way to overstate how disturbing the opening scene of this production is and how well it sets the tone for the rest of the movie. More importantly, thanks to David Michael Latt, Appleton's First Law of Bad Movies: any movie written, directed and produced by the same individual will almost certainly become *Mystery Science Theater 3000* (MST3K) fodder—also applies. I know the old proverb about saying something nice, but when watching something this bad you just have to make comments about it.

This direct-to-video release by The Asylum, a company that predominantly offers low-budget horror fare, "stars" C. Thomas Howell, looking at least 10 years older than his listed age of 39 and doing nothing for his long-stalled, post-*Soul Man* movie career with his work in this film. He plays George Herbert (I wish I was making this up), an astronomer who is getting ready to embark on a trip to Washington, DC with his son and much,

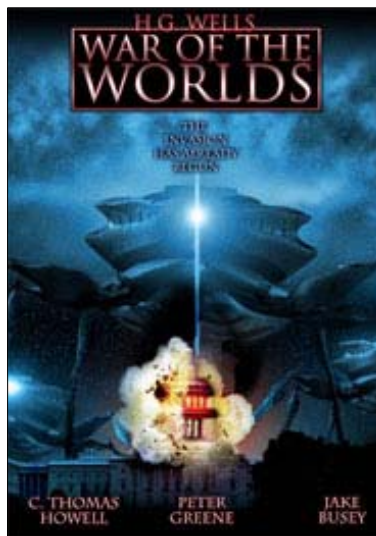
much younger-looking wife—whom we saw drying off after a shower in the movie's opening scene and actually looks closer in age to her son than George. Just before leaving, a meteor streaks across the daytime sky, and he's called into his office while his wife angrily takes their son to DC without him.

On his way to the observatory, during which time night suddenly falls, another meteor strikes near the secluded country road he's driving on. Amazingly, despite the fact the meteor's descent

created an electromagnetic pulse that knocked out everything electronic in the nearby area, dozens of people rapidly find their way to the crater, where an alien machine just as quickly emerges from a cylinder and immediately starts killing people. Of course a few morons just stand there with their jaws agape at the lame CGI graphics—which for some reason render the alien machines like one of the bugs from *Starship Troopers*—but people need to be tentacle-whipped and/or skewered to death.

At least no one attempted Salvatore's white flag maneuver from the 1953 George Pal adaptation.

There's very little to recommend about this production other than the cheese value. To his credit, Latt attempts to have the machines use poison gas to kill people, but based on how little he shows the machines, my guess is that's because it saved money on the special effects. Furthermore, he addresses a common complaint about the story—i.e., it's ludicrous to suggest that bacteria would wreck havoc upon alien invaders stupidly unprepared for them—by having George proactively create a virus to kill them. However, by addressing this concern, Latt has ignored the fact that George is an astronomer, not a microbiologist, that there's only a microscopic chance (pun in-



tended, it's self defense) that the alien physiology was close enough to mammalian for a rabies-derived virus to work and that there's little chance for it to spread since the aliens never really come into contact with each other, given that they're mostly self-contained in their machines and that rabies is not an airborne virus. Did the aliens bite each other to spread it?

Beyond the proactive approach to killing the invaders, much of the novel actually finds its way into this adaptation. We get the obligatory trapped in the farmhouse scene—complete with a Pastor who loses his faith and gets himself killed by the aliens—the protagonist's trek across the countryside, the flight to the capital city and the dying alien at the end. The artilleryman, who didn't appear in Spielberg's or Pal's versions, makes an appearance, although Latt oddly split his character into two, making one a sympathetic character who gains George's trust and the other, played by *Starship Troopers* refugee Jake Busey, a mentally-unbalanced officer with dreams of how to rebuild society underground, by gunpoint if necessary. (Maybe Busey brought a bad movie virus over from *Starship Troopers*.) Anyway, we're somehow supposed to feel sorrow when good artilleryman dies and relief when bad artilleryman dies.

In the end, we're given the happy ending of Herbert finding his family in the ruins of the Lincoln memorial—amazingly, Washington, DC's Memorial Bridge survived by transforming itself into a completely different, smaller structure—where they promised to wait for him in their last telephone call before all communication went down. Like the Spielberg happy ending, this totally puzzled me; just how are we supposed to feel happy for this particular family when we know that millions of people in this fictional world lost their lives in this invasion—when the remains of a demolished monument to one of America's most be-

loved presidents lie at their feet? Is it somehow supposed to be emotionally cathartic? The only way thing that Latt could've done to make the scene any cheesier is have a bunch of gun-carrying apes appear from the bushes and encircling our hero. Nevermind, Tim Burton already did that in a remake of a different sci-fi classic.

Sadly, the only such release comes when the credits start rolling. Only people with a taste for bad films and/or those looking to write overextended essays about the many different versions of *The War of the Worlds* should bother with this one.

VII. *War of the Worlds: Global Dispatches*, edited by Kevin J. Anderson (1996)

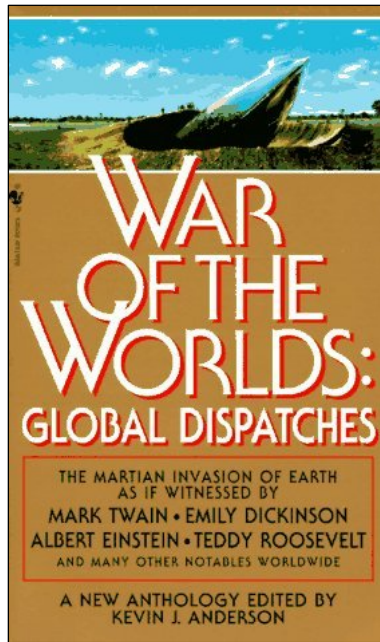
The cover of the book states the premise of Kevin J. Anderson's anthology very clearly: "The Martian invasion of Earth as if witnessed by" a series of historical figures from all around the globe and from various facets of life. However, in the hands of the various authors involved, something

about the simplicity of the premise was lost. In his introduction to the 14th installment of his *Year's Best Science Fiction* series, Gardner Dozois wrote about this collection:

"Some of the authors are... not really all that familiar with Wells's original story, as is shown by a number of internal inconsistencies, which really should have been caught by the editor (who makes one mistake in chronology himself)." (Dozois, xxxiv)

After reading this book I have to whole-heartedly agree with him.

In some ways, reading this anthology of short stories is downright infuriating. Given the nature of the collection, you'd expect some sort of chronological consistency—surely the invasion



would have taken place around the globe more or less simultaneously. Instead, the dates range anywhere from the late 1890s (such as the Roosevelt story) to the early 1900s (Daniel Marcus' "Blue Period"). To be sure, part of the problem results from the fact that Wells didn't give exact dates in the original novel. Still, this is the type of thing that Anderson could have addressed when commissioning the stories.

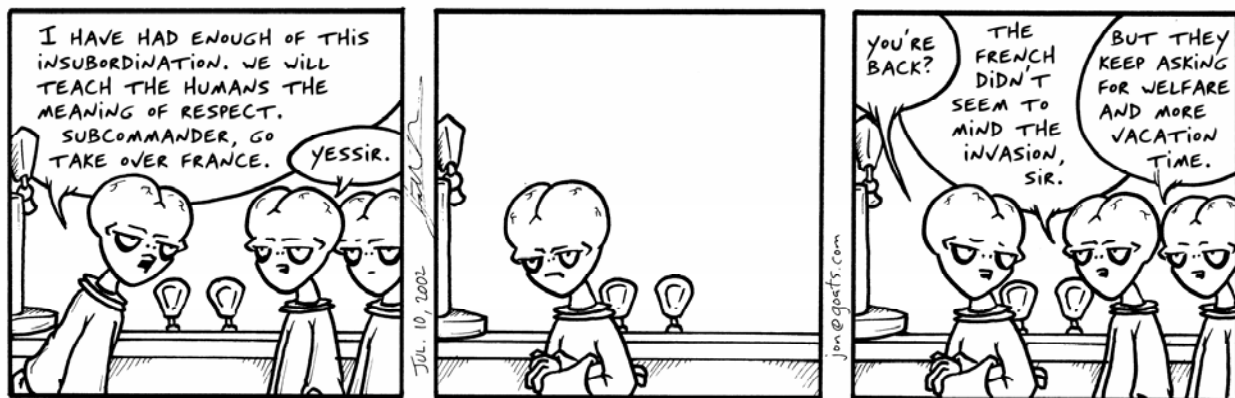
But chronology isn't the only problem. In other instances, the authors incorrectly address how the Martians act when invading the planet. In "Blue Period," which features a 19-year-old Pablo Picasso, Marcus has the Martians building their tripod and attacking Paris almost instantaneously, something that took more than a day to achieve in the original. However, I don't mean to pick on Marcus because that's the type of error made by many in this anthology.

A far more farcical example (one pointed out by Dozois) is the sight of a Martian tripod trying to copulate with the Eiffel Tower in David Brin's and Gregory Benford's "Paris Conquers All." Dozois points out the most egregious part of this scene—that the Martians driving the tripods are organic and would be as sexually attracted to the Eiffel Tower as a human would be to a Sherman tank—but the other aspect of this error involves the introduction of new elements to Martian physiology and how the Martian control the tripods in their attack on humankind. I think the story was intended as some sort of farce, but if so, that's not the impression I came away with.

As an example of how to turn Wells' material into real comedy, however, look no further than Howard Waldrop's "Night of the Cooters"—the only reprint in the collection. Waldrop provides a wonderful little insight into the reason why the Martians were initially so successful in *The War of the Worlds*: the reserved British didn't fight back immediately, thinking that the initial attack from the pit at Horsell Common was a misunderstanding. Certainly, reasoned Waldrop, those living in less civilized Texas would have far less inhibition about firing back—especially if the local sheriff is a veteran of the Confederate Army. I also found Waldrop's decision to refer to the aliens as "Cooters" an amusing touch; given that it's also a slang term for the female genitalia, it makes you realize just how much Wells' description of the Martians sounds like a H. G. Giger nightmare of that portion of the female anatomy.

Given her track record, it comes as no surprise that Connie Willis went for a comedic spin on the subject matter with her Hugo Award-winning "The Soul Selects Her Own Society: Invasion and Repulsion: A Chronological Reinterpretation of Two of Emily Dickinson's Poems: A Wellsian Perspective." Given that she died over a decade before the publication of *The War of the Worlds*, Ms. Dickinson certainly isn't an obvious choice for inclusion in this anthology. However, Willis does an amazing job with her faux-academic paper which posits that she arose from the dead and helped thwart the Martians when they invaded Amherst. Part of this argument rests upon the au-

Goats: The Comic Strip by Jonathan Rosenberg



goats: the comic strip jul. 10, 2002 <http://www.goats.com> jon@goats.com ©2002 jonathan rosenberg. all rights reserved

thenticity of two fragments of newly discovered poetry in 1991. It reads like the type of research paper that only a truly demented grad student can write. Although I hold a degree in English Literature, I don't know much about Dickinson and I read little of her work. As a result, I'm quite certain that there are layers of subtle humor that escaped me during my reading.

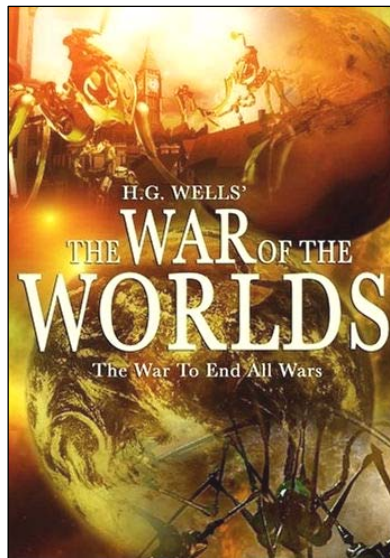
Another wonderful little gem in this collection is Walter Jon Williams' "Foreign Devils." Set in China's Forbidden City, the story illustrates the Chinese reaction to the invasion. Williams does a remarkable job of illustrating the parallels between the Martian invasion and the British occupation of much of the Chinese mainland, and in doing so he more explicitly develops the anti-imperialistic theme of the original novel. In addition, he adds a nice touch with his portrayal of an Emperor who is ruthlessly cowed by and under the domination of one of his generals. Ultimately, he must find the strength within himself, with the help of the Dowager Empress, to dispose of the general when the Martians begin dying.

But it was rather easy to pick those three stories out as all three were Hugo Award nominees. There are a couple other interesting stories as well. In "A Letter from St. Louis," Allen Steele provides a reporter's view of the Martian attack on St. Louis, with Joseph Pulitzer listed as the historical figure of note for the story. However, he's a minor character who makes a token appearance at the story's conclusion. Steele's story stands out because the style is very much like the one Wells employed; our narrator is not part of the story—a reporter actually—and he does nothing other than narrate what he sees and flee from the invaders. Along the way, Steele throws in a couple nice touches by alluding to Martian landings at Grovers Mill, NJ and referencing the yellow journalism practiced by Pulitzer and his rival William Randolph Hearst as a reason why

Americans may not initially believe press reports of a Martian invasion taking place in the early years of the 20th century.

Another fun story in this collection is George Alec Effinger's "Mars: The Home Front." In this story, Effinger ties together the Mars depicted by Edgar Rice Burroughs and the Martians depicted by Wells. Although I am not familiar with Dickinson's work, I have read *Princess of Mars* (the first of Burroughs' Barsoom novels) and found Effinger's treatment entertaining, respectful and energetic. My only issue with the story was that bringing the

two sets of species together, John Carter's adventures on Mars means that he has brought Earth bacteria to the red planet. Ultimately, this means that Wells' Martians will become extinct once the Terran microbes spread across the planet completely across the planet. This may also bode ill for the Barsoomians, who presumably also lack the ability to fight bacteria. Nitpick aside, it was a fun little story to read, and it's a shame that Effinger passed away before he could potentially cash in this past summer with an expanded version.



VIII. H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds: The War to End All Wars*, directed by Timothy Hines (2005)

I'm not sure, but I think my DVD player sacrificed itself in a vain effort to save me from watching this in its entirety. I was watching the Pendragon Pictures direct-to-video adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* for the first time when my Panasonic player died mid-movie. I think it's only a coincidence that it gave up the ghost in the middle of this film and flashed the dreaded "H07" code (meaning the spindle motor died)¹ on its display, but, again, I'm not completely sure.

This movie was so bad that 25 minutes into the film I was rooting for the Martians to start killing as many of the actors as possible, as quickly as

possible. And when the heat ray finally started firing, the people behind this adaptation present the viewers with *writhing skeletons*. As ridiculous as that sounds, you just have to see them—and the many other ridiculous aspects I’ll mention in a moment—to believe it.

I honestly don’t think I can properly convey the wretchedness of the film, but here’s my best attempt. During its stint on the Sci-Fi Channel, there was an episode of *Mystery Science Theater 3000* where Mike got to choose whichever movie he wanted to see, and hoping for the type of refined culture he hadn’t experienced since the experiments started, he decided on *Hamlet*.² He was sent an amazingly bad German production dubbed into English with Ricardo Montalban providing the voice of Claudius. (“Hamlet tasks me and Laertes shall have him! I shall chase him around the stairs of Elsinore castle before I give him up.”)³ If the show was still airing new episodes and Mike asked to see *The War of the Worlds*, he’d get the Pendragon version.

Amazingly, even though neither of the previously mentioned Appleton’s Law of Bad Movies came into play, this version still easily exceeded the wretchedness of the Asylum production, which looks like a Kubrick production compared to this piece of flotsam. Sadly, this version represents the first attempt by a movie studio to film a version faithful to the original setting of Wells’ story, and for that reason I really wanted to like it.

Unfortunately, there is plenty to dislike about this film. The filmmakers decided that it would be a good idea to film the movie in a manner that would remind the viewer of old film being played back at the wrong speed. They also tint the film in shades of dark green, grey and red for no ascertainable reason. The same actor was used to portray both The Narrator and his brother from London, and makeup only used a really goofy-looking mustache and differing hairstyles to cover this up. The producers also dared to include plenty of footage of the characters just traveling through the English countryside, without saying a word. You’d think someone would comment on the Mars fauna taking over the English

landscape, especially since it’s depicted in such a nice, vivid Technicolor red, but not so much as a “Wow, that looks like a really bizarre plant” is spoken. It’s not like they were attempting anything like *Quest for Fire*, in which there were reasons for the characters to remain speechless throughout.

Those immensely long periods of silence are all the more disconcerting when you realize that the film is three hours long, and the worst thing is that they don’t even adapt the book in its entirety. The scene where The Narrator encounters The Artilleryman once again is cut-off right in the middle when he realizes that The Artilleryman lacks the gumption and skills necessary to realize his vision for surviving the Martian attack and organizing a counter-attack. He makes this realization, and then suddenly he’s presenting himself to a Martian tripod so that they will either incinerate him—and presumably let his skeleton dance a mambo before it finally disintegrates—or use him as their next Martian version of an ultimately lethal Slim Fast. No drunken card playing with The Artilleryman, no noticing the dying Martian shrubbery (which probably makes sense given that no one bothered to mention anything



about it before), no foreshadowing of the Martian demise, and no last trek to London before witnessing the death of the invaders.

Three hours long, and all that still got left out. It’s all the more amazing when you consider that *The War of the Worlds* is a relatively short novel by modern standards and that better, shorter adaptations have been made from longer books. The wait for a *good*, faithful movie adaptation of the story will just have to continue.

IX. *The Second War of the Worlds*, by George H. Smith (1976)

As I mentioned in the introduction [see the first part of this piece in the Summer, 2005 issue], back when I first got the idea to embark on this project, I thought I would just reread the original novel and then examine the Pal and Welles adaptations and the Anderson anthology before taking the time to

watch the summer blockbuster directed by Steven Spielberg. The first warning that these items only represented the clichéd tip of the iceberg came when my best friend brought George H. Smith's *The Second War of the Worlds* to my attention.

If there's one thing I'll give Smith credit for it's his imagination. The title of the book is somewhat misleading in that it's not really a true sequel per se. Rather Smith shoe-horned the original story into a series of books he had already written. The novel is set on Annwn, a parallel universe counterpart of Earth where magic exists. It turns out that the invasion of Earth, as told by Wells, wasn't launched by Mars. Instead, it was launched by the inhabitants of Thor, the fourth planet of Annwn's system. It turns out that they used a portal—called a Shimmering Gate—that let them slip

between the two universes to Mars, attacking Earth because they thought it would be an easier target than Annwn. Now that they know about bacteria, they figure they will now attack Annwn, this time armed with a way to deal with the bacteria. Furthermore, they now have the help of the Circle of Life, a secret cult of humans from Earth who worship the Martians—not “Thorians” as you might expect, the characters agree to continue to use the Terran term—as gods.⁴

And how do the inhabitants of Annwn know this? Well, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson (who are called Mr. H and Dr. W throughout, presumably due to copyright concerns that didn't apply to Wells' original novel) passed through a Shimmering Gate connecting Earth and Annwn to warn its inhabitants of the cult and the threat they pose. His efforts convince small group of Annwnians work to thwart the Circle of Life just as the first green bursts are seen coming from the surface of Thor.

Got all that?

The bulk of the novel chronicles the conflict between the two groups of humans while they prepare for the Martian's inevitable invasion of

Annwn. In fact, the Second War doesn't take place until about two-thirds of the way through the novel. However, because this “sequel” was pigeon-holed into a series already started by Smith, there are constant references to and conversations

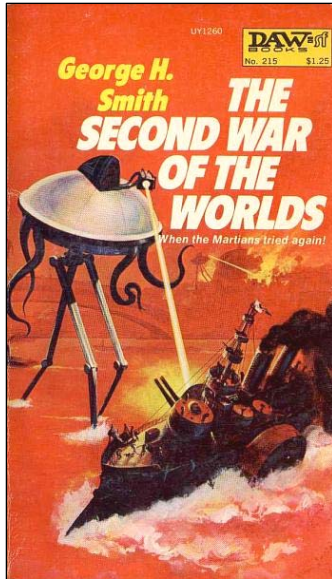
about previous events in his series. Amazingly, Smith actually wastes a few pages in his book by having one of the characters read aloud a scene out of Wells' novel to the other characters. At the risk of overburdening this piece with MST3K references, you should never include scenes from classic novels in your crappy novel.⁵

I'm actually being a little unfair with the last comment. If you can get past the fact that it also serves a middle book in an unrelated series, *The Second War of the Worlds* is actually a rather competent novel. If you're looking for a something in

the light reading/mindless entertainment category, this novel will certainly amuse you. However, given that Smith's novel is out of print, you can far more easily find other original, mid-list novels out there that will entertain just as well.

X. Final Thoughts

After the Hines production and the Smith novel, I just had to stop. In his thoughts on the *Global Dispatches*, Dozois wrote that the best way to read the stories was “spaced as widely as possible.” (Dozois, xxxiv) The same can be said for trying to read and watch as many different versions as possible; coincidentally, I burned out on this project halfway through reading that collection, but plowed through to finish Hines and Smith. Although I would certainly love to watch it, I think it will take me some time before I'm ready to start watching the first season of *The War of the Worlds* television series⁶ after they appear in stores on November 22. Nonetheless, it certainly has been a memorable experience. I came away learning that much like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the basic story has taken on a



life of its own and has mutated well beyond the confines of Wells' original vision. Because the story has become so much a part of our culture, it's easy for someone to use it as template upon which one can project his/her own agendas, and the ease of doing so will continue to make the story an enticing basis.

The two direct-to-video releases weren't the only new items related to *The War of the Worlds* appearing in conjunction with the Spielberg production. Kevin J. Anderson, writing under the pseudonym Gabriel Mesta, wrote *The Martian War*, which mixed aspects of Wells' life with his fiction (Dr. Moreau is a character in the novel) to present a story where his novel was based on real-life events. In addition, Douglas Niles published *War of the Worlds: New Millennium*, which like the Spielberg production re-imagines the Martian attack happening in early 21st century America. Although I haven't read either novel, both currently reside on my bookshelves.

As I alluded to when discussing *The Second War of the Worlds*, there's still plenty more out there. Apogee Books recently reprinted *Edison's Conquest of Mars*, an unauthorized sequel published by the Hearst newspaper group a few months after Wells' novel arrived in America. Although 1984's *The Adventures of Buckaroo Bonzai* isn't a sequel per se, as part of its premise the Martian invasion of Earth really did take place, with the Pal and Welles adaptations serving as historical documents. For those looking for non-fictional approaches to the material, this past summer Glenn Yeffeth at Benballa Books released *War of the Worlds: Fresh Perspectives*. There have also been numerous comic book adaptations over the years. You can also find information on numerous other adaptations and sequels with a meticulous websearch.

Over the coming decades, it wouldn't surprise me to see another big budget adaptation from Hollywood or more authors use the 1898 novel as a springboard. Much as Wells probably couldn't have envisioned the Cold War or terrorism used by Pal and Spielberg in their respective adaptations, I'm certain that any future adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* will also become a product of its time, with contemporary fears and concerns projected upon it.

Notes

1. Apparently, this is a very common problem for Panasonic DVD players sold a few years ago, and performing a Google-search on "Panasonic H07" will yield plenty of pages describing the problem. Usually, this happens just over a year after the player was purchased. I should consider myself lucky that my player lasted three years before choking on the Pendragon release.
2. Nelson, Michael, *et al. Mystery Science Theater 3000*, "Hamlet," production number 1009, original airdate: June 27, 1999.
3. No, those lines really didn't appear in the MST3K version, but it should have.
4. The Circle of Life was also years ahead of their time by employing the same type of Double-speak that American political lobbying groups now employ when naming their organizations. You can find an excellent primer on this at http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Front_groups.
5. Nelson, Michael, *et al. Mystery Science Theater 3000*, "Overdrawn at the Memory Bank," production number 822, original airdate: December 6, 1998.
6. The series originally aired on American television from 1988 through 1990.

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Breaking Out of the Golden Age, or “Finding My Voice as a Writer”

By Danny Adams

I love the Golden and Silver Ages of science-fiction too much.

I wonder if a lot of my issues as a writer boil down to that. I grew up reading stories from Campbell’s *Astounding*, from Boucher’s *F&SF*, from the early *Galaxy*, and so on: The Golden Age along with what Lester Del Rey called “The Age of Acceptance”, primarily the 1950’s. Far and away most of my favorite sf stories come from this period, and it’s easier for me to find stories from this time that really hit me than a lot of today’s work.

This isn’t to say I think stories today are bad—just the opposite. I think many are superior in pretty much every way that counts. I enjoy the lion’s share of the new stories and poems I read.

But overall I tend to remember the older stories more in the long term, maybe for the same reasons so many folks of my generation often say they like *M*A*S*H*, *Cheers*, *Night Court* better than *Friends* or *Seinfeld*, *St. Elsewhere* better than *ER*, or *Hill Street Blues* better than *CSI*. (Or for that matter, Glen Larson’s *Battlestar Galactica* is better than Ron Moore’s.) It’s what was wired into our brains.

Unfortunately this is how I write, too, and since our calendar year does not fall between 1938 and 1960, this is a problem. I keep finding myself writing stories that would be perfect for a thirty-something John Campbell, or a thirty-something Frederick Pohl, but not Stanley Schmidt or Gordon Van Gelder or Ellen Datlow. I was likewise utterly surprised when I wrote stuff enjoyed by Benson, Blaschke, Marin, Schweitzer, Mohanraj, and Simon (all of whose magazines I frankly rank up with the Big Three in terms of enjoyability).

I really don’t have a clue for what to do about this. I read far more contemporary sf and fantasy than I do classics, I take mental notes, I review with myself what I liked and disliked about the stories, and yet...

What is it that keeps classic sf stuck in my head, and apparently the writing corner of my brain? I’ve been trying to review without much success: the “sense of wonder”? I don’t think we’ve lost that; there are plenty of authors I could

refer you to who have a magnificently developed sense of wonder. Was Golden Age sf more optimistic? Not necessarily, particularly when you take into account the stories of alien invasions, stories of atomic warfare or post-Holocaust imaginings, atomic warfare set off by alien invasions, and so on. I just don’t know. Maybe it really is a case of hard-wiring.

I look to Philip Jose Farmer as an example. His first love was pulp fiction, which was already mostly “Out” by the time he started seriously writing. If he’d come around a few years earlier I’m sure he’d still be remembered, though in the misty way we remember Nat Schachner and Raymond Z. Gallun. But he eventually “got” it: he turned his love of pulp into a format he could mix with contemporary writing.

Of course, it took him several years with only one story sale in the meantime to do it. I think this is probably where the “ten years” figure comes in again I hear about so much—become an overnight success after ten years of hard work!

I’ve also discussed this with more contemporary writers and many of their comments boil down to one thing that was already cementing in my head. It’s a wisdom I’d already considered before but started letting slip away: Write what you want to write. If you love writing, and if you love what you are writing, that will be its own reward; if you find a market for what you write, even better.

This, really, sums it all up.

But to answer some other points folks made when I asked them to consider my dilemma:

I may also be blurring the distinction between writing and selling. Since I’ve been listening to Glenn Miller a lot lately (perhaps I’m simply being nostalgic for a time I’m too young to remember?), Big Band music pops into mind first as an analogy. Suppose I wanted to be not a writer but a musician, and I adored Big Band music. I could bemoan the notion that I was born fifty years too late, but that wouldn’t be very productive. If I truly loved the music, there are still Big Bands out

there—including the Glenn Miller Orchestra, for all that—and they might offer me a small but potential way to do what I loved. I know that Big Band will never be Top 40 again, but that doesn't mean I'll be unhappy. Likewise, nothing would stop me from playing at home, or even possibly forming my own band, just as nothing short of catastrophic physical or mental injury would stop a writer from writing.

On the other hand, I could be the next Harry Connick, Jr., or doing standards ala Rod Stewart. One author told me, "What we love and what we write aren't the same things". As I replied (sort of), I love Atari games, though I wouldn't try to make a business out of writing code for an Atari 2600. But this is something I missed in my thoughts, despite writing about how Phil Farmer turned pulp into mainstream sf. If I can identify elements I like so much about Golden Age sf, there's nothing stopping me from putting those elements into my own stories (if I'm not already).

Others discussed writing voice. I know, as much as I hate to admit it, that even though I've been writing since 1983 (well, since elementary school, really, but here I mean writing with the intent to be a published author), I've only been seriously-consistently-regularly writing and trying to publish since the spring of last year. Meaning from a certain point of view, I only have 1½ years of writing experience. I'm still trying to find my writing voice, then; the suggestion was made that my love of the Golden Age meant its icons were overshadowing my voice. Entirely possible; I'll also grant that I'm still too green, iconic imitations or not. This being the case, I'm willing to be patient, and keep working.

Another gentleman pointed out to me, "Hugos, Nebulas, fancy awards and applause—a Jedi craves not these things." I considered using this sentiment to title this essay with tongue-in-cheek, but further reflection made me wonder if the tongue was lodged as firmly as I let myself believe. Do I crave awards? I honestly think I don't—but I'll be the first to admit that I do crave publishing. I enjoy entertaining people (at least I hope the stories and poems are entertaining), but I did realize that being published is *encouraging*.

Thinking back to each sale I made, I realized that the feeling of elation that came with it had nothing to do with recognition in itself, but was instead like a shot in the arm.

I imagine winning an award would feel much the same.

I also realized one major difference between a lot of classic sf and a lot of what's out there today: Style. Classic sf much tended toward what Asimov called the "clear window" style of writing, where the reader—well, reads what happens. This is as opposed to the "stained glass window" style more popular nowadays, with more description, more flourishes in the prose, more elaborate writing. I think that may be one of the clinchers right

Editorial: The Busy Season

October is a very busy month for me. My wedding anniversary, my son's birthday, my father's birthday, Halloween and the preparations that go with it, and—this year—my sister-in-law's wedding all fall into this month. Somewhere in the middle of all that, I need to squeeze in the production of the Fall Issue of this 'zine. Unfortunately, because so much was going on this past month, I am uploading this issue later than I would like.

All this is a long way of my getting around to apologizing for not meeting either of the initially posted publication dates on the webpage. I was hoping that putting up target dates on the website would give me the needed impetus to get the job done fast. Obviously, I was wrong. Given the current publication calendar, it would behoove me to better plan future fall issues so that they online in the middle of the month rather than towards the end.

Having said that... Welcome to the First Anniversary Issue! With its publication, I am also officially launching an Editor's Blog. Links to it as well as blogs of other *Some Fantastic* contributors are now available in the Blogs section of the *Some Fantastic* website. Of special note in the blogs is Chris Garcia's *Fanzinia Strikes*, where he reviews other fanzines in the field.

Before this issue was finalized, a wonderful, new resource guide hit the bookstores: Gary Westfahl's *Science Fiction Quotations*. Anyone who considers themselves an sf fan and doesn't already own a copy should rush out and get one—after reading this issue in its entirety, of course. On a more practical level, given that every issue of this 'zine thus far

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there. Much of my experience with stained glass writing found work that was unreadable and distracting, which means it's likely I'll never be able to write it.

(And yet I love language, and love playing with words, and love poetry. If someone knows of a stained glass author I absolutely must read, whom you are certain will change my mindset on this, feel free to contact me at dda@wwco.com!)

Editorial

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has carried some sort of quotation at the bottom of the page, it's nice to have such a book lying around for such easy use. The only shame of Westfahl's book is that it came out before *Serenity* hit the theaters; there are a couple lines of that movie that certainly would merit inclusion.

Speaking of *Serenity*, I have to admit to some surprise at how good the original series, *Firefly*, and the movie were. I stopped watching television sci-fi a long time ago, and when all my friends who were Joss Whedon fans started hyping the movie, I decided to check out the original series. I was hooked after just a couple episodes. The sf purist within me saw that the star system featured in the series was damn-near impossible and that the mix of western with sci-fi occasionally strained at the bounds of incredibility, but those nitpicks were relatively minor. It's a fun show, far more worthy of Gene Roddenbury's "Wagon Train in Space" descriptor than *Star Trek* ever was, and if you haven't seen it, track down the complete series DVDs and watch them.

Also looking ahead to the next issue, I'm hoping to incorporate some material on the big changes going on in comic books. For those of you who don't know, big changes are afoot in DC and Marvel universes. I was a regular Batman reader when DC attempted to rewrite its universe with the Zero Hour series, but from what I understand those changes didn't stick. It will be interesting to find out whether these new changes are fully realized and remain in place.

Not related in anyway directly to *Some Fantastic*, but I recently completed my collection of the current Gardner Dozois *Year's Best Science Fiction* series. For those of you who don't have such a set or aren't pursuing one, the first couple volumes in the series—the ones issued by Blue Jay before St. Martin's took over—will set you back quite a bit. Despite monitoring it on eBay for years, I am still surprised at how much the *First Annual* collection continues to sell for.

As always, thanks for downloading!

—Matthew

Finally, a lot of writers and readers alike shared with me, in detail, their love of classic sf. Good to know I'm not alone! But it occurred to me that these stories, like them are not—like this idea or not—are the foundations of what we're building. They are our literary fathers and grandfathers. No matter what you think of pulp, it paved the way for people like Asimov and Clarke and Farmer. No matter what you think of the Golden Age, each story, good and bad, was a brick in the "Age of Acceptance" and on to modern sf. Even if one thinks old sf is filled with stilted dialogue and "As you know, Bob...", those folks deserve our perpetual respect. There's a reason that one of the top sf awards is called the Hugo, after all.

For a list of publications Danny's work has appeared in, please see his bio at the end of his reviews of ReVisions and You Bet Your Planet on page 15 of this issue.

some fantastic

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