

some fantastic

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Editorial

In the editorial to the first issue, I stated that while I intended to keep sf in the foreground of *Some Fantastic*, I also planned to include social issues and other pop culture phenomena in the pages of the magazine. That didn't quite happen in the second issue. I did reprint a short story, but by and large the magazine remained an sf critzine. As you will see when you read this issue, that's still essentially the case.

However, I hope that I made an additional step in regards to pushing at the edges of the critzine format. Beginning with this issue, *Goats: The Comic Strip* will make regular appearances. Sf is an integral part of *Goats*, and in this and (we hope) future issues I will reprint strips that I think have relevance to that particular issue. You can see the strip in its entirety online at <http://www.goats.com/>.

Also in this issue you will find an article by *Philadelphia Daily News* sports columnist Bill Conlin. The beginning of April marks the beginning of the baseball season, and I thought it would be nice to acknowledge that with this issue. The fact that the Philadelphia Phillies are integral to the piece and that they are my favorite sports team on the planet had nothing to do with my decision to secure his permission to reprint it.

Looking forward, I've decided to maintain the sf-centric focus to the magazine, but am always looking for items that are of genre interest, even if they don't quite fit into the critzine format. I'd love to receive feedback on this, and I will try to find ways to keep the readers of *Some Fantastic* entertained. As always, if you have something you'd like to submit to us, by all means please send it my direction so I can take a look.

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"That's the Title on the Manifesto": Labor and Class Concerns in *Harry Potter*

By Wendy A F G Stengel

Editor's Note: The following paper was originally presented by the author at the Nimbus 2003 Convention in Orlando, Florida.

"Class is still essential to a proper understanding of British history and of Britain today. Class is undoubtedly a British preoccupation." – David Cannadine (Wagner)

"There is nothing in the fact of work that degrades; it is only the workers who are degraded." (Linton, *Maids*)

"It's S.P.E.W... Stands for the Society for the Promotion of Elfish Welfare... I was going to put Stop the Outrageous Abuse of Our Fellow Magical Creatures and Campaign for a Change in Their Legal Status – but it wouldn't fit... I've been researching it thoroughly in the library. Elf enslavement goes back centuries. I can't believe no one's done anything about it before now." (*Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* [GoF], 224)

Kings and peasants. Masters and servants. In-group and out-group. Class explorations are hardly new in British fiction. However, with the phenomenal interest in J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, these issues are firmly in the hands of children, teens and adults around the world. While protestors decry the possibility of a mistaken mystical message seeping into children's minds, stronger political messages are coming through. Class conflict is on the rise. Revolution is in the air.

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Lister: "Hey, it hasn't happened, has it? It has 'will have going to have happened' happened, but it hasn't actually 'happened' happened yet, actually." Rimmer: "Poppycock! It will be happened, it shall be going to be happening, it will be was an event that could will have been taken place in the future." –*Red Dwarf*, on temporal paradox.

It is tempting to view the major labor conflict of the *Harry Potter* world—the status of house-elves—simplistically: “Slavery is bad.” However, the house-elves’ exploitation resonates on many more levels. For most of the target audience, slavery itself is seen as an historical, American concern, and is completely indefensible. As many otherwise-sympathetic characters support the use of unpaid house-elf labor, there is clearly more going on. Harry and Hermione have similar mud-blood backgrounds having been raised as Muggles, but have very different levels of political awareness; Harry treats Dobby decently, Hermione becomes a firebrand for labor rights, the Weasley children beg for them not to challenge the status quo. From exploring the status of and reactions to the house-elves, we can extrapolate the production and perpetuation of class in the wizarding world.

Though anyone attending an international symposium on *Harry Potter* is apt to be familiar with elvish basics, it is important to look at just

Editorial

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Other Odds & Ends

The speed with which the Bush administration added fuel to the Orwellian fire after the release of the last issue just astonishes me. It made me wish that I had waited another month before printing “George W. Bush, the Far Right, 1984 and The Forever War.” Paying columnists to shill for their political agenda and using fake journalists to protect the President in press briefings gives new meaning to trying to craft a message.

While compiling the material for this installment of *Some Fantastic*, *Locus* magazine’s annual Year-in-Review Issue arrived on the newsstands. In it you’ll find the paid circulations for various short fiction magazines, and once again the news is discouraging. Circulation among them dropped again, and I’m starting to feel as if I’m part of a dying species just because I still attempt to keep up with them.

Finally, count me in as among those who ultimately didn’t miss hockey at all when the NHL officially cancelled its 2004-05 season. Strange, one of the things I learned from *Star Trek* was that Major League Baseball was the first major North American team sport to become totally irrelevant; not hockey.

— Matthew

what, exactly, house-elves are. They are “magical brethren” of the wizards (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* [OotP], 127) and are bound in service to one family and one house for life (*Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* [CoS], 14). They have their “own kind of magic,” and we are given hints that it is that magic which does the actual binding of elf-to-family (*GoF*, 687). Having a house-elf in your family is a sign of privilege:

“Well, whoever owns him will be an old wizarding family, and they’ll be rich,” said Fred.

“Yeah, Mum’s always wishing we had a house-elf to do the ironing,” said George. “But all we’ve got is a lousy old ghoul in the attic and gnomes all over the garden. House-elves come with big old manors and castles and places like that, you wouldn’t catch one in our house...” (*CoS*, 27-28)

Though they are servants, they are not paid; they are not, however, bought or sold as slaves would be. Indeed, dismissing a house-elf requires breaking the magical bond through a ritual of presenting clothing to the elf. When Lucius Malfoy is tricked into throwing a sock to Dobby, he snarls, “You’ve lost me my servant, boy” (*CoS*, 338). In *CoS*, at least, the master of the elf is the only one who can free the elf from bondage—otherwise, Harry could have freed Dobby himself.

Though Dobby annoys Harry, and repeatedly attempts to harm (but not kill) him, Harry is sympathetic to Dobby. It is hardly surprising, as Harry views himself as an outsider, and fellow-outsider Dobby frames elf subjugation as part of Voldemort’s evil influence, elf redemption by Harry’s victory.

“Dobby remembers how it was when He Who Must Not Be Named was at the height of his powers, sir! We house-elves were treated like vermin, sir! Of course, Dobby is still treated like that, sir,” he admitted, drying his face on the pillowcase. “But mostly, sir, life has improved for my kind since you triumphed over He Who Must Not Be Named.” (*CoS*, 178)

As early as *CoS*, Dobby seems aware of house-elves as a class, and an exploited one at that. We have no other house-elves to compare him with at this point, however, and we do know that the respectable Weasleys do not seem at all disturbed by the current status of house-elves. If *CoS* were our only exposure to house-elves, we might well take Dobby at his word: house-elves had it very badly before Harry defeated Voldemort, but things have vastly improved for all house-elves not in cruel Malfoy's employ.

In *GoF*, however, we start to see the system as it really is. At the Quidditch World Cup, we meet a "proper" house-elf, Winky:

"Ah, sir," said Winky, shaking her head, "ah, sir, meaning no disrespect, sir, but I is not sure you did Dobby a favor, sir when you is setting him free."

"Why?" said Harry, taken aback. "What's wrong with him?"

"Freedom is going to Dobby's head, sir," said Winky sadly. "Ideas above his station, sir. Can't get another position, sir."

"Why not?" said Harry.

Winky lowered her voice by a half-octave and whispered, "He's wanting paying for his work, sir."

"Paying?" said Harry blankly. "Well – why shouldn't he be paid?"

Winky looked quite horrified at the idea and closed her fingers slightly so that her face was half-hidden again.

"House-elves is not paid, sir!" she said in a muffled squeak. "No, no, no. I says to Dobby, I says, go find yourself a nice family and settle down, Dobby. He is getting up to all sorts of high jinks, sir, what is unbecoming to a house-elf. You goes racketing around like this, Dobby, I says, and next thing I hear you's up in front of the Department for the Regulation and Control of Magical Creatures, like some common goblin." (*GoF*, 98)

Other than her aversion to being paid for her labor, Winky comes off every bit the proper Victorian house servant. She is unswerving in her loy-

alty to the family she serves, she suffers abuse and neglect without complaint, and the worst thing she can imagine is being cast aside (*GoF*, 138). The comparison holds up: servants in both systems are status symbols,¹ they are a part of the family much the same way the silver is part of the family, and in the proper execution of their tasks, they are ignored,² a fact that gives them more power than their masters may like. "Dobby hears things, sir, he is a house-elf, he goes all over the castle as he lights the fires and mops the floors" (*GoF*, 491). Domesticated in both scenarios, were "immured in their basements and attic bedrooms, shut away from private gaze and public conscience... remained mute and forgotten" (Burnett in Landow).

When they break from the quiet background, they risk their security. As we see by Mr. Crouch's reaction to Mr. Diggory, the family considers the elf an extension of its dignity: "If you accuse my elf, you accuse me, Diggory!" (*GoF*, 137) and can be punished

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for tarnishing it. A house-elf cast aside faces the same problem as a house-maid who has outlived her usefulness: there is “not only the impossibility of chance of making a solid provision for their future... but no length, or fidelity of services constitutes a claim for support when the working-time is over and old age has come on” (Linton, *Maids*).

When Percy justifies Winky’s dismissal on the grounds that a wizard “deserves unswerving obedience from his servants,” she retorts: “His slave, you mean! ...because he didn’t pay Winky, did he?” (*GoF*, 154) Hermione, a good little Muggle girl, latches on to a capitalist interpretation of the situation: If Winky is not a paid for producing commodities, she must be a commodity herself: a slave. Her reaction to the situation is not that of an abolitionist, however. She does not campaign to free the house-elves from their work. Rather, she wants to bring them into the capitalist system, giving them wages, paid leave, and retirement funds. Hermione is a fledgling trade unionist, a fact not lost on the Weasley twins.

“Going to try and lead the house-elves out on strike now, are you?” said George. “Going to give up all the leaflet stuff and try and stir them up into rebellion?” ... “Don’t you go upsetting them and telling them they’ve got to take clothes and salaries!” said Fred warningly. “You’ll put them off their cooking!” (*GoF*, 367)

One can hardly discuss capital and labor issues without discussing Marx and Engels. They cannot fully answer house-elf issues, however, as they focus so closely on wage-labor and capital-producing industrialism. Remove the issue of capital from labor, and their economic arguments lack firm footing. However, we must consider Marx and Engels at least in passing, as Hermione has no doubt been exposed to some of their teachings in her Muggle upbringing—she dubs her S.P.E.W. organizational documents a “manifesto,”

and shows all the earmarks of a radical campaigning for a new world order.

Central to Marx’s labor theories is the notion of class, and the conflict that arises from class differentiation. The house-elves, however, are “pre-class”—they lack class-consciousness. “Although an aggregate of people may occupy similar positions in the process of production and their lives may have objectively similar determinants, they become a class as a self-conscious and history-making body only if they become aware of the similarity of their interest through their conflicts with the opposing classes” (Coser). Dobby, as an individual, is becoming aware of the conflict, but can not as an individual actor give elvish society true class consciousness, as the elves do not see themselves as at war with the wizards. Goblins, on the other hand, are “magical brethren” with strong class-consciousness, and have transformed that consciousness into political action through a series of rebellions: “Goblins don’t need protection... They’re quite capable of dealing with wizards... They’re very clever. They’re not like house-elves, who never stick up for themselves” (Hermione in *GoF*, 449). The other magical brethren, the centaurs, have chosen to live apart from, rather than be oppressed by, the wizards.

Hermione is a product of an industrial, capitalist society, so even though she is now acting in a non-industrial society, she responds to crisis with the tools she understands: political power and ideology, which “serve the same functions for capitalist that class consciousness serves for the working class” (Coser).³ She wants to lessen the degree of disempowerment of the house-elf workers, which would ultimately give renewed legitimacy to the system as a whole (Ganter). Hermione’s need to reform the system is understandable; she has embraced the wizarding world wholeheartedly, and finds that it is supported through the oppression of others. She would suffer too much cognitive dissonance if she took no action, but a truly revolutionary course of action



would endanger the world she's come to love. Even so, her progressive stance causes discomfort with those she would "save."

"Begging your pardon, miss," said the house-elf, bowing deeply again, "but house-elves has no right to be unhappy when there is work to be done and masters to be served."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!" Hermione cried. "Listen to me, all of you! You've got just as much right as wizards to be unhappy! You've got the right to wages and holidays and proper clothes, you don't have to do everything you're told – look at Dobby!"

"Miss will please keep Dobby out of this," Dobby mumbled, looking scared. The cheery smiles had vanished from the faces of the house-elves around the kitchen. They were suddenly looking at Hermione as though she were mad and dangerous." (*GoF*, 538-539)

Though Hermione's desire to turn the house-elves into wage-laborers is in direct conflict with Marxist goals of abolishing wage-labor, some of the answers to the house-elf problem can be found in Marx. Marx examines two systems of labor pre-dating wage-labor: slavery and serfdom.

"The slave did not sell his labor-power to the slave-owner, any more than the ox sells his labor to the farmer. The slave, together with his labor-power, was sold to his owner once for all. He is a commodity that can pass from the hand of one owner to that of another. He himself is a commodity, but his labor-power is not his commodity. The serf sells only a portion of his labor-power. It is not he who receives wages from the owner of the land; it is rather the owner of the land who receives a tribute from him. The serf belongs to the soil, and to the lord of the soil he brings its fruit." (Marx)

The topic of slavery certainly has a place in a discussion of labor and Harry Potter, if only be-

cause Hermione constantly refers to the house-elves and their labor in slavery terms. However, framing the issue solely—or even, primarily—as one of slavery paralyzes the discussion. Slavery is bad, evil, wicked, not to be tolerated, something all reasonable people abhor. Supporters of slavery are all those things, and more. Consider, then, that the Weasleys are supportive of the use of house-elf labor, and that we are shown over and over how admirable and just the Weasleys are; we must conclude that we can not frame labor in Harry Potter strictly as slavery without damaging the text severely.⁴ Moreover, in Marx's definition of slavery, the slave is bought and sold as a commodity; we have no evidence of house-elves ever being bought or sold. In fact, when Mr. Crouch wants to get rid of Winky, he has no option but to *free* her (*GoF*, 138).⁵

If we are to move from slavery as an intellectual framework for non-wage labor, we can follow Marx and look at the historical non-wage labor of England: feudal serfs. Serfs were neither bought nor sold. They were bound to the land and their lords through oaths (and extreme financial dependence). Serfs had obligations to toil for the lords above them, but the lords, in return, had obligations to care for their serfs—though the standard of care was negligible. If a lord were to lose his land, or die, the lord who replaced him would carry on the obligations to the land and the serfs. This was deemed to be entirely natural, and, indeed, decreed by God.

And since it is ordained from the original and superabounding wisdom of all things, That there should be Degrees and Diversities amongst the sons of men, in acknowledging of a Superiority from Inferiors to Superiors; the Servant with a reverent and befitting Obedience is as liable to this duty in a measurable performance to him whom he serves, as the loyalest of Subjects to his Prince. (Alsop)

Serfs had no self-determination, no possibility to act upon self-interest, and no expectation of class-mobility: serfs lived and died serfs, tied to the land. Kreacher is the strongest elf-as-serf im-

age we have in *Harry Potter*, yet he does not express the gushing loyalty to his master that we've seen before; he loathes his master. He tries to render as little productive service to Sirius as possible, and thwarts Sirius' activities to his best ability. However, he is devoted to the Black house, and bound to it until his head should join those of his ancestors, collecting dust on the wall. Sirius, for his part, does "not hate Kreacher...he regard[s] him as a servant unworthy of much interest or notice" (*OotP*, 833). Serfs are also a distinctly a pre-industrial labor source, and as such, fit nicely into the non-industrial wizarding labor scheme.

However, the feudal system parallels break down when you try to include non-lords and non-serfs; where are "the rest of us?" The rise of the middle class in post-plague Europe coincided with the fall of feudalism; the Weasleys are decidedly post-feudal. They are, however, part of a strong caste, system. A Victorian reformer said one "might as well talk to a high caste Hindoo (*sic*) of the common humanity of a Brahmin and a Pariah as to English gentlefolks of the common humanity of a mistress and her maid" (Linton, *Maids*). And, if one does consider class, race,⁶ and caste as equivalent,⁷ we can discern how the Weasleys and Hagrid can be sympathetic and yet not be engaged in elf-rights: brethren or no, they simply do not see a common bond of humanity between themselves and the house-elves.

"The way the were treating her!" said Hermione furiously. "Mr. Diggory, calling

her 'elf' all the time ... and Mr. Crouch! He knows she didn't do it and he's still going to sack her! He didn't care how frightened she'd been, or how upset she was – it was like she wasn't even human!"

"Well, she's not," said Ron.

Hermione rounded on him.

"That doesn't mean she hasn't got feeling, Ron. It's disgusting." (*GoF*, 139)

Ron, however, is a product of his class, and shares the common class views. The four castes in Indian culture map neatly onto the classes in Harry Potter. [See next page.]

One of the most striking caste-apologists is Hagrid.⁸ When asked, he refuses flat out to join the ranks of S.P.E.W.:

"It'd be doin' 'em an unkindness, Hermione," (Hagrid) said gravely ... "It's in their nature ter look after humans, that's what they like, see? Yeh'd be makin' 'em unhappy ter take away their work, an' insultin' 'em if yeh tried ter pay 'em."

"But Harry set Dobby free, and he was over the moon about it!" said Hermione. "And we heard he's asking for wages now!"

"Yeah, well, yeh get weirdos in every breed. I'm not sayin' there isn't the odd elf who'd take freedom, but yeh'll never persuade most of 'em ter do it – no, nothin' doin', Hermione." (*GoF*, 265)

Goats: The Comic Strip by Jonathan Rosenberg



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Considering Hagrid is himself an object of prejudice, especially in *GoF*, his resistance to changing the status of house-elves is disconcerting. He moved from being a Vaisya to being a Brahman when he became a teacher—Malfoy’s insults notwithstanding—but has also been forced back out of the Brahman class at various times. If house-elves were able to elevate themselves from Sudra to Vaisya status, his own class status could be threatened; the rags-to-riches successes often turn into riches-to-rags stories. The perceived threat of class mobility can also explain the Weasleys’ ambivalence: already poor, the sons keep moving down the class ladder, yet with so many prefects and Head Boys in their line, they have to have some aspirations to the highest Brahman class.

Where do these aspirations come from? From the temple of class itself: Hogwarts. Hutton says, “English private schools have always been one of the great production sites of the class system,” and the same holds true for the wizarding schools in *Harry Potter*. Offspring of all human classes (including the otherwise Untouchable Muggles) are admitted as equals, and through their skills and efforts can climb to new class levels. The first task new students submit to is the Sorting, which separates and class-ifies them.⁹ The games, the punishments, the rewards of Hogwarts life are all structured to build house solidarity, and through that, class pride.

The Triwizard Tournament in *GoF* also serves to reinforce class. Though the stated purpose is to build ties between the wizarding communities, each school keeps mostly to itself, and all students

Indian Caste, as described in <i>The Mahabharata</i> , Udyoga Parva	Classes in the <i>Harry Potter</i> Series
<p>Brahman: “study..., offer sacrifices, make charities, and sojourn to the best of all holy places on the earth; he should teach, [and] minister as a priest” (Hinduism).</p>	<p>The Teachers: Professors at magical schools. They minister to students and the wizarding society as a whole, and are widely admired.</p>
<p>Kshatriya: “protect the people in accordance with the injunctions of the law, diligently practice the virtue of charity, offer sacrifices, ... and lead a virtuous householder’s life” (Hinduism).</p>	<p>The Administrators and Managers: Members of government, in the Ministry of Magic. Though the Malfoys no doubt view themselves as the equivalent of the Brahmanas, others treat them as Kshatriya – high up on the pecking order, but by no means virtuous and pure. The Weasley family as a whole is in this caste, but that is changing with the new generation (much to Percy’s chagrin). As classically doctors would be in this caste, Hermione’s background would be Kshatriyan.</p>
<p>Vaisya: “diligently earn and accumulate wealth by means of commerce, agriculture, and the tending of cattle. He should so act as to please the Brahmanas and the Kshatriyas, be virtuous, do good works, and be a householder” (Hinduism).</p>	<p>The Merchants and Producers: Shopkeepers, groundskeepers, gamekeepers, bankers. The Weasley twins situate themselves firmly in the Vaisya caste when they drop out of school to open their shop. Draco Malfoy baited Ron, suggesting that he could only hope to climb UP to this class level, and become a gamekeeper.</p>
<p>Sudra: “serve the Brahmanas and submit to them; should not study... he should be diligent and be constantly enterprising in doing all that is for his good. The king protects all these with proper care, and sets all the castes to perform their respective duties” (Hinduism).</p>	<p>The Servants and Laborers: Here we find the house-elves, and other “magical brethren.” It is important to notice the patriarchal “protection” promised – it is similar to the protection a liege lord would offer his serfs.</p>

engage in in-group/out-group discussions and put-downs—Beauxbatons are snobs, and cross-breeders; Durmstrangs are thugs and practitioners of the Dark Arts! Seeing the individual Beauxbatoner or Durmstranger is frowned upon within the Hogwarts peer groups; it's all about class distinction, us versus them.

Class production is not as easy as merely feeding a set of beliefs and values to a captive audience, however, as Hermione has discovered. She feels the house-elves must be “uneducated and brain-washed,” (*OotP*) or they'd know they were unhappy and downtrodden. Her education efforts, however, do not focus on the elves themselves, but rather on her fellow students. There, it seems, her efforts can take hold.

“Harry, Ron, and Neville got into their pajamas and into bed. Someone – a house-elf, no doubt – had placed warming pans between the sheets. It was extremely comfortable...” (*GoF*, 191)

Harry starts to grasp the fact of labor outside of a specific elf's mistreatment or one witch's strange passions. By *OotP*, even Ron starts advocating for the elves, though his concern is that Hermione not trick them into unwanted freedom (*OotP*, 255).

At the close of the fifth *Harry Potter* book, the wizarding world is precariously balanced. The second war is coming; Voldemort is back; and the complacency of the previous thirteen years has been ripped away. Moreover, the students under Dumbledore's tutelage are beginning to question their long-held class beliefs, especially in light of the house-elves, their magical brethren. Dumbledore says, “The fountain [of Magical Brethren] we destroyed tonight told a lie. We wizards have mistreated and abused our fellows for too long, and we are now reaping our reward” (*OotP*, 834). The Order is scrambling to regain ties with outcast creatures

like the giants, and retain ties with the goblins and centaurs to prepare for the upcoming war, but is faced with the distrust laborers have for the bourgeoisie. Successfully reaching across class lines—all class lines—will be vital for the triumph of wizardly good.



Moreover, it is vital for the triumph of our good. The *Harry Potter* series is wildly popular, crossing all country and class boundaries. Reinforcing the subjugation of laborers and negative caste structures is damaging to readers. Rowling has it within her power to change the treatment of

labor and class in *Harry Potter*, and show the world how to move past degrading others.

Revolution is in the air, and in the hands of Muggles everywhere.

Endnotes

1. They were both also thought to be frivolously interested in nothing but clothing.
2. “Well, they hardly ever leave the kitchen by day, do they?” said Nearly Headless Nick. “They come out at night to do a bit of cleaning ... see to the fires and so on.... I mean, you're not supposed to see them are you? That's the mark of a good house-elf, isn't it, that you don't know it's there?” (*GoF*, 181)
3. Marxist theory also speaks to the Weasley's lack of concern: “[Political economy] confines itself to systematizing in a pedantic way, and proclaiming for everlasting truths, trite ideas held by the self-complacent bourgeoisie with regard to their own world (Marx, in Engels).”
4. Thankfully, this intellectual shift has a historical precedent: A Victorian lady, accused of treating her maid as a slave, said “To compare the feelings of English ladies towards their maids with those of slave-holders towards their slaves is just one of those extravagances which none but the ignorance of a volunteer reformer would have ventured on (Linton, *Mistresses*).”

5. The fact that she has just recently bound herself to his son complicates matters; though the world views her as both freed and disgraced, she is still bound magically to the family.
6. In particular, its historical legacy of slavery.
7. What caste is to India and race is to the United States, class is to Britain." (Wagner)
8. Slytherins, in particular, are proud of their class consciousness: they are "pure," and clearly aspire to Brahman caste levels...or at least, Brahman resources, privilege, and leisure. An attempt to map the four houses to the four caste levels of Indian society could prove interesting; however, space and time do not permit that exploration in this paper.

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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.

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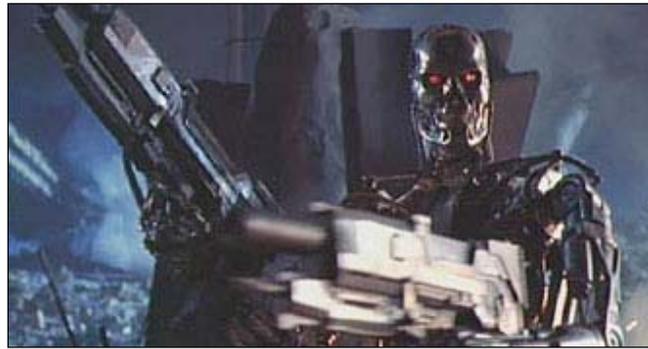
“No Fate or Human Misconception?”: Fate in the *Terminator* Films

By Alex Esten

It's an interpretation that is so widely held that most find it difficult to consider anything to the contrary. If you asked anybody who has seen and discussed *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (T2) on any level, it's very likely you would hear the same thing: Judgment Day was prevented (see the Fall, 2004 issue of *Some Fantastic* for an example of this). And because this interpretation has been repeated so often, many consider it to be official. But interestingly enough, this is a fallacious, severe misinterpretation; Judgment Day has always been inevitable throughout the *Terminator* films, and consequently, “No Fate” (and its audience “following”) is actually purely human misconception.

It seems tragically obvious to many, and to some, a point not even worth consideration, but the pure, physical, action-oriented dominance of the various Terminator models throughout *Terminator* (T1) and T2 functions on two levels. The first level is purely superficial: the Terminators are nigh-indestructible, fully armored, killer cyborgs that feel no pain, pity, or remorse. They're called “Terminators” for a reason, after all. But the second level goes far deeper than that. Because the Terminators are so destructive and powerful, and thus propel the action forward much more than any human character, it can be said that the Terminators are in control of the films, in control of “destiny.” In effect, they are Fate, an unstoppable, unwavering force that is headed in our direction.

Evidence of this Terminator control is the premise of the first film: Skynet, a computer defense network, sends a Terminator back through time to assassinate the leader of the human resistance. It is a machine that initiates the conflict; it is a machine that propels the action forward. This occurs in every single scene, as well. Whether it is



the Terminator's first appearance in T1, where it brutally slaughters a few thugs (putting its fist through one's chest, which requires enough force to puncture the breastbone and rib cage), the cold-blooded murder of the gun shop owner, taking a buckshot round in the face and then performing surgery on itself, getting run over by an 18-wheeler (and getting blown up in said 18-wheeler then rising out of the fire like the Phoenix), the

Terminator cannot be stopped. Each and every time it gets knocked down, it gets right back up and resumes the chase, even after getting blown in half by Kyle's plastique in the robotics lab at the end of T1. The Terminator is only finally

stopped by a hydraulic press that completely crushes what's left of its endoskeleton.

T2 only further cements this theme, because the new Terminator antagonist cannot be destroyed, only mildly injured—a flesh wound, if you will. The T-1000 is caught in a tanker truck explosion in the waterway chase sequence, only to casually walk out of the flames in perfect condition. Similar to the T-800 in what is surely an intentional parallel, it takes buckshot rounds to the face and body, but unlike the T-800, it requires no surgery to repair the damage. The bullet holes merely vanish as the liquid metal coalesces. Apart from the liquid nitrogen and the molten steel (both at extreme opposite ends of the damage spectrum), the T-1000 is indestructible. Aside from those extreme situations (the hydraulic press, the liquid nitrogen and the molten steel), there is no stopping the Terminators. If thirty police officers couldn't kill one T-800 (or even defend themselves with a minimal level of efficiency), how could three humans possibly save the entire world from a global thermonuclear holocaust?

Simply, there is no way, because throughout the films, the Terminators are dumptrucks, and

the humans are little Micro Machines that get in the way. This analogy is actually rather appropriate, as well, because during the casting process for the role of the Terminator in *T1*, James Cameron and his crew mention how they were looking for an actor who had the “face of a dumptruck.” The question then becomes if this impossibility is so obvious, why don’t we see any evidence that the human characters, namely Sarah Connor, have thought about it? After all, it seems reasonable that if trained police officers (and SWAT teams in *T2*) couldn’t put up a fight, three people blowing up Cyberdyne isn’t going to have any dramatic effect on the apocalyptic future.

The answer lies in something many fans have not considered: one, that Sarah Connor is not a Prophet; two, that she is basing her actions and outlook on a twisted misinterpretation of John’s message—a high jacking, in a sense—and three, her hyperemotional reactions directly contradict the manner of approach demonstrated by the successful characters in the films.

Firstly, I’d like to strongly emphasize that Sarah is not a Prophet, even though many have (erroneously) elevated her to such a status. When discussing the course of the future in the *Terminator* films, many quote her narration at the end of *T2*, claiming it to be proof that she and John prevented Judgment Day, because she looks to the future with a sense of hope. The key point they’re missing here is that she doesn’t know they prevented Judgment Day, because her sense of hope is just that: hope. It’s not fact. It’s not reality. It’s a human emotion. She’s not making any type of prediction in that final speech. She’s expressing what she wants, and what she wants is a future without Judgment Day. Keep in mind that she only knows of Judgment Day because she was told about it, and not because she had a major revelation or a premonition similar to Abraham, Moses or Muhammad, so she has no idea what the future holds.

Secondly, many attribute the “No Fate” message to Sarah Connor, and with good reason. She is the mouthpiece for it in *T2*. But again, there are key subtleties that people are missing. For example, the idea of No Fate was introduced in *T1*, when Kyle recites John’s message for her. The religious imagery here is fairly obvious. John is the God figure,

Kyle is the Prophet (a Christ figure), and Sarah becomes a Disciple. But the message that Kyle delivers (“There is no fate but what we make for ourselves.”) does not relate to Judgment Day at all. When Kyle speaks of “No Fate,” he is merely reciting an inspirational speech, a battle cry to rally the troops. John is not telling Sarah that there is no Fate entirely, but only that she must survive the impending assault from the T-800. If the message had been a “downer,” Sarah would have given up, and John would not exist. He is merely telling her exactly what she needs to hear at this point in her life, given the current situation. The sole purpose of No Fate is not to tell Sarah to fight and prevent Judgment Day. The purpose of No Fate is to inspire her to survive in the face of a very real and concrete (and lethal) adversity.

Unfortunately, that message is not the same in *T2*, because Sarah has largely discarded the original meaning behind the philosophy and twisted the idea around to better serve her own goals (preventing Judgment Day). Whereas John’s message of No Fate was adaptation through determination and perseverance, Sarah’s is an all-out war fueled by passion and intense psychological anguish. In this sense, Sarah is similar to Al Qaeda, in that both twist a specific doctrine to support their own respective Idealistic crusades.

Thirdly, Sarah’s behavior and approach are inconsistent with the attitude and emotional detachment that are necessary to realize a successful campaign against Skynet and its Terminators. Only through assuming the cold, efficient qualities of the Terminators themselves are humans able to achieve victory, and the humans’ failure to do so is a foreshadowing of the inevitability of Judgment Day, because in order to kill a Terminator, one must be a Terminator. This concept is manifested most clearly in the characterization of John Connor, the leader of the human resistance and savior of mankind. While his resolve, determination, and cunning battle strategy enable the resistance to rise up against the machines and “smash those metal mother-fuckers into junk,” his mannerisms, movements, and facial expressions mimic those of a Terminator, and not those of a human.

We first see John behind a pair of binoculars, which give an initial impression of a mechanical

soldier. As he lowers the binoculars with arms locked in a rigid 90-degree angle, however, it becomes clear that the binoculars are not the only thing inhuman. John's head turns on a fixed, rigid axis, and only after his eyes have moved first along the same fixed, rigid axis, a physical trait of the Terminator in *T1*, and a trait we will see in the two Terminators later in this film. John's eyes are cold and distant; there is no life to them. His face is locked in an impassive gaze. John is not a human surveying the battlefield; he is a Terminator scanning the battlefield. The humans win because they are being led by a Terminator.

If John is the symbol of success, then it could be said that any human seeking a victory in the films would need to emulate John's mannerisms and behaviors precisely. Sarah Connor does not. She rarely demonstrates the necessary coldness seen in John, and her inability to control her most primal emotions surfaces multiple times throughout *T2*, the first during the Pescadero state mental hospital episode. When Dr. Silverman, Sarah's psychologist, informs her that he is not going to recommend that she be transferred to a minimum security wing, she attacks him like an animal. This lashing out is not going to help her, however, because heated passion is not conducive to Sarah's ultimate goal of preventing Judgment Day, as we see from John's demeanor in the Prologue, and in the mannerisms of the Terminator units themselves.

Sarah's escape later, however, is going smoothly—as smoothly as an escape from a maximum security wing can go, of course—because Sarah has planned the entire escape beforehand and is executing it with cold precision. In order to take Dr. Silverman hostage, she throws a ring of keys at the orderly reviewing medication schedules with him, and then quickly incapacitates the orderly in the brief second of distraction. Silverman begins dialing the front desk, but is quickly stopped as the nightstick comes cracking down on his forearm. Sarah's movements are fast, clean, and coldly efficient.

Later, however, as she is running to an open elevator, fear takes over as she sees the T-800 stepping out. Sarah runs back down the hall, screaming "He'll kill us all! He'll kill us all!" and not even the burly orderlies are going to stop her.

She begins clawing her way across the floor, a wounded animal trying to escape a predator. She loses complete control over herself and lets her emotions overtake her. Her emotions again prove overly dominant when she decides to assassinate Miles Dyson, the man "most directly responsible" for Skynet's development. "Most directly responsible" is a key phrase here, because while Dyson was the primary researcher for the project, "most directly responsible" would indicate there were others also working on it, and would certainly have data of their own, quite possibly in their homes, if Dyson is any indication of common work habits of Cyberdyne employees. Given the very likely existence of other research and data of other members of the team, it's hard to believe that blowing up Dyson's home and the Cyberdyne office is going to stop anything. If anything, it would only delay Judgment Day.

Sarah believes that by killing the creator, she kills the off-spring. The parallels being drawn between Sarah and Skynet are fairly clear here, and further re-enforced by the dialogue between young John and the T-800 as they race to Dyson's house to stop her, "Killing Dyson might actually prevent the war," as the T-800 says. Sarah is thinking like a Terminator, but unlike a Terminator, she is hindered by emotion, and is unable to detach herself enough to become the Terminator we see in adult John. She is unable to finish the job as she stands over Dyson, pistol drawn, and again, like Pescadero, her inability to act without emotion foreshadows her ultimate failure in preventing Judgment Day.

In a pivotal moment in *T2*, when Sarah is confronting the T-1000 in the steel mill, she is unable to send it into the molten steel because she is short by one shotgun shell. Had she not fumbled moments before in the first encounter with the T-1000 on that same walkway, she would have had the shell she needed, and would have been able to kill the Terminator. However, in a moment of human fear and panic, she dropped the shell. Again, her inability to act with the cold efficiency of both the Terminators and adult John hindered her effectiveness in destroying Terminators, and later, in preventing Judgment Day. Sarah's characterization in *T2* is a stark contrast to her "You're termi-

nated, fucker” during the hydraulic press in *T1*. She has abandoned compassion, love, fear, etc., at this point, and is now focused on one goal and one alone: killing. She has been transformed into a killing machine, a Terminator, and had adopted the emotional detachment of John Connor, the human Terminator, and thus was able to terminate the machine. It was an example of Terminators killing Terminators.

However, throughout *T2*, this powerful, cold, emotionless efficiency disappears, and Sarah becomes who she was at the beginning of *T1*: an emotional, sensitive, caring, and weak human. It is the complete antithesis of what the victorious human is, as illustrated by the older John Connor in the Prologue of *T2*. As Sarah only rarely demonstrates this cold efficiency in the film, often acting out of pure emotion and never out of pure logic, her efforts to prevent Judgment Day become exercises in futility, because emotion is not the weapon of success, as shown by John’s Terminator-like movements in the Prologue.

Most audiences enjoy happy endings. That much is clear. There’s a certain satisfaction in knowing everything is going to work out in the end; the hero will ride off into the sunset with his love interest; that world-wide chaos will be averted. For the most part, happy endings are good things. But sometimes a happy ending just doesn’t “fit” within the context of a film. Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* is a perfect example. The entire film is dark, grungy and rainy, but then in the

theatrical release’s ending, Deckard and Rachel are driving off into a picturesque forest on a bright and sunny afternoon. There’s no precedent at all for that happy ending, and similarly, the “happy ending” interpretation of *T2*, the ending in which they prevent Judgment Day, also has no precedent at all.



The humans in the films are secondary characters, merely along for the ride when Terminators are on-screen. The characterizations throughout the two films clearly identify what approach works (Terminators) and what doesn't (Sarah Connor) in the

context of the struggle, and it's this context of the films that indicate a very clear conclusion (Judgment Day being inevitable and “No Fate” being a human misconception), despite the mildly ambiguous ending of *T2*. The ending of *T2* is also significant because the theatrical release’s ending was not the original conclusion to the film. The alternate version featured an older Sarah Connor, sitting on a park bench, watching John and his son play on the playground, as she talked about the future without Judgment Day. James Cameron canned this ending because he felt that if the future was in fact changeable, then it couldn't be changed with one action. That “one action” was blowing up Cyberdyne.

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

Book Review: *McSweeney's Enchanted Chamber of Astonishing Stories*, edited by Michael Chabon

By Christopher J. Garcia

Anthologies are tough. They rely on the ability of a reader to digest sometimes wildly different styles and do so in small chunks. This seldom succeeds, with notable exceptions like *Dangerous Visions* and the Polyphony series. Maybe it's Michael Chabon's editing, but *McSweeney's Enchanted Chamber of Astonishing Stories* is a single unit where every one of the stories scratches and claws with the others, resulting

in a near battering of literary quality.

The concept of the anthology is pretty simple: get a bunch of genre authors with mainstream cred and have them write genre stories in a literary vein. The stories are from some real big names, Margaret Atwood, Poppy Z. Brite, Joyce Carol Oates and some guy named Stephen King, alongside a few others who are less known, such as Jason Roberts, Jonathan Lethem and Roddy Doyle. The selection of authors is so good that I could overlook the fact that the two authors who would have most interested me to see in this context, T.C. Boyle and Christopher Buckley, are not present. It is not merely the names involved that excited me nor even the quality of the prose, but the effect that each of the stories seems to inflict on the others.

The opening story, Maggie Atwood's "Lusus Naturae," is one of the weaker stories in the collection, but it serves as a table setting. It is a perfect example of what Chabon seemed to be going for, and though it lacked some of the impact that the other stories brought with them, it certainly announced the direction of the anthology. Perhaps it was starting off with a literary horror story that made me able to release so much for the rest of the work. The writing is good but the story feels somewhat stunted, as though it was cut to fit neatly into a pre-designed text box.

The second work is one of the real joys of the collection: David Mitchell's "What You Do Not Know You Want." This is a detective story set on Hawaii dealing with the search for the knife that ended Yukio Mishima's life. It's a fantastic story with a voice that screams post-modernist while still playing in the Noir mode. The semi-twist at the end and the interesting touches of fantasy that seep in through the corners only add to it. If I could turn one of these stories into a film, it would be Mitchell's opus.

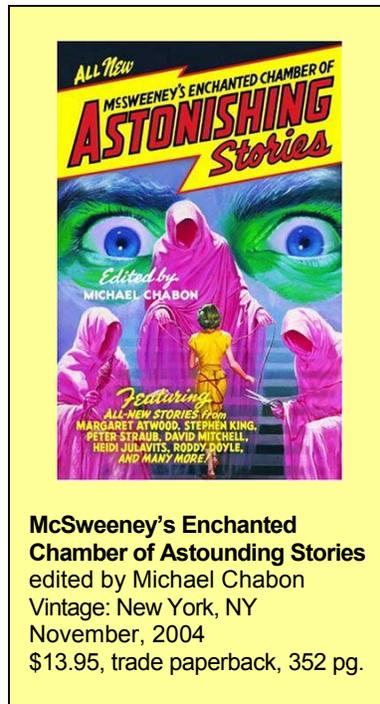
There are several stories that reminded me strongly of Wheatland Press' *Polyphony* series.

Jonathan Lethem's "Vivian Relf" and the Charles D'Ambrosio story "The Scheme of Things" both seem to play in that field. They are of the T.C. Boyle world of genre, where it's not strictly identifiable in a single rut, but it certainly feels like it belongs. "Vivian Relf" is one of those stories that just plays so smooth that you almost miss the layer of sarcasm that lives beneath. It's a smart story and the writing is fantastic.

Perhaps my favorite stories were the ones that felt as if they could have come directly out of the pages of *Analog* or *Fantasy & Science Fiction*. "The Miniaturist" by Heidi Julavits is an example, though at times it feels a bit too much like an old episode of *The Outer Limits*. The prose is well-crafted, and the atmosphere is chilling at times. It felt like a science fiction story and not a literary work that happens to be a science fiction story. It plays with the themes that had been presented in previous stories in the collection, but it also pushed the whole thing forward, setting the table for more.

Another great science fiction story, "7C" by Jason Roberts, is a great work dealing with temporal mechanics and the issues surrounding the formation of singularities and quasars. It's a straight no chaser science fiction story that is so well written that I forgot I didn't understand a single bit of the science they are talking about. This is the most in-genre story in the anthology, and one of the most satisfying.

Perhaps the most powerful story was written by Ayelet Waldman. "Minnow" is the story of a woman who has lost her unborn baby and then has to deal with the sounds of a baby crying through her baby monitor. This also had a strong *Twilight Zone* feel to it, but it also played so true and honest, not only with the reader, but with the characters, that the thought of it didn't come to me until well after I'd started writing this review. It is heart-breaking and one of the few stories that strike me on a second reading as even more po-



tent. Waldman uses imagery that haunts without over-powering the reader, while at the same time builds a world that closes in on us.

China Mieville does a larger scale take on the concept from Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. "Reports of Certain Events in London" tells the story of VFs, streets that fight and wander though cities and around the world. It's a strange story, not quite Flatland strange, but quite odd and beyond my grasp of imagination. This is a fantastic piece and might have been the highlight of the last half of the anthology.

The few letdowns were pretty mild. Stephen King's "Lisey and the Madman" was the first Stephen King story I'd ever read, and while it was interesting and even had me scratching my head at points, there was little to distinguish it. The same could be said of Peter Straub's selection. *Delmonico*, by Lemony Snickey himself Daniel Handler, was a little bit Noir-ish and a little bit bar story, but it seemed to have trouble making up its mind as to which direction it was going. It was

well written and kept me all the way through, but it wasn't the knock-out that many of these stories managed to become.

Probably the most disappointing thing was the art of Mike Mignola. A fantastic artist, reduced to two colors, he tried to rely on shadow to convey everything and I didn't think his work added much. Easily, the best piece of art in the whole work occurs on the cover and was done in 1949 by Lawrence Sterne Stevens as a cover for *Fantastic Novels*.

There's no reason that you shouldn't go out and pick up *McSweeney's Enchanted Chamber of Astounding Stories*. It's a great read that manages to change gears every 20 pages or so and still reward you with a great unity of spirit. Hopefully we'll get more of this kind of anthology.

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.

The Phillies in 2083: A Look Ahead at the Phillies Bicentennial Season

By Bill Conlin

Editor's Note: When the Philadelphia Phillies celebrated their centennial season in 1983, they included in their yearbook an article outlining the myriad of changes that Major League Baseball witnessed during that period. With an eye to the future, the Phillies hired Bill Conlin, a sports columnist for The Philadelphia Daily News, to imagine what type of history lesson the fan of 2083 might need.

They used to play baseball in a huge concrete saucer at the southern terminus of the long-departed Broad Street subway line. The heroes of those Phillies teams so faded by years of change were Hall of Famers Pete Rose, Mike Schmidt Steve Carlton, Von Hayes and Juan Samuel. Although many records and artifacts of that dimly remembered era were destroyed in the Poverty Revolution of 1992-3, enough remain for fans preparing to celebrate the team's 200th anniversary this season to appreciate how far the Global Pastime has progressed in the Modern Era.

It is difficult to conceive fans of that time burning precious fossil fuel jamming the decaying highways and polluting the atmosphere, but they did. And nearly 3 million watched the 1983 Phillies celebrate the Centennial. Contrast that with attendance last season in the Carpenter Dome, which was just over 500,000.

Although use of home computers had become widespread toward the end of the last century—particularly in the Gray '90s—and video technology had achieved a certain sophistication, our forefathers were dealing with the mere tip of the iceberg, to use a quaint 20th Century expression. In retrospect we of the Solar Age can forgive their mistakes, understand the nuclear accidents which turned Western Pennsylvania and most of Ohio into a Forbidden Zone. Those were ignorant times. Even the most erudite futurists of 1983 failed to predict the breakthrough by genetic engineers which doubled the Biblical three score years and ten. How would our ancestors, so steeped in the

ethics of their Judeo-Christian heritage, have reacted to the 42d Amendment to the Constitution, which in 2057 created the National Birth Lottery?

Thomas Malthus warned in the early 19th Century that the population would eventually outstrip the food supply and the amendment which limited child-bearing to one woman in 10 was the only way Congress could achieve today's minus population growth and a projected 2100 population of just 125 million.

According to surviving materials in the Compu-Library, the 1983 Phillies were criticized for their advancing age. One newspaper wag of the day christened them the "Wheeze Kids," The oldest player on that team of 100 years ago was Rose, who played at age 42 and beyond, The average age of Manager Microchip Jones' starting eight this season will be 64, Home run king Dickie Allen, great grandson of a Phillies slugger of the 1960s, will be entering his 45th big league season and experts predict he will eventually eclipse the career home run of record of Ching Pu, the legendary Peiking Proletarians star. In fact, Allen will be honored by the Prols when the Phillies blast off from Pine Barrens Regional Orbitport for their upcoming road trip to Vancouver, Honolulu, Tokyo, Seoul, Peiking and Capetown.

If a 1983 Phillies fan had been permitted a glimpse of today's game, he would be more startled by its setting and global scope than by the few modest rules changes. The most radical, of course, was the addition of a fifth infielder in 2045. The rules change became necessary when the distance between the bases was increased to 95 feet after Nairobi Jets outfielder Kwando Bikili stole 345 bases in 2043. When 45 players hit over .400 the next season, the extra infielder was added during the Winter Meetings on Space Resort 7. Stationed behind second, the midstop has cut down the number of cheap hits through the much larger infield of the modern game.

Visitors to our century would find that baseball is still a game played with a round ball and a round bat. You still have to hit it square. But the days of the replaceable bat are, of course, long gone. Allen has used the same 42-ounce Permabat for more than 20 seasons. Although the cost is high—an av-

erage of 1,500 petrounits per bat—their dense carbon, teflon and titanium construction makes them virtually indestructible. The Variable Flight Ball, customized for the aerodynamics of each park, was another useful innovation.

The major change, of course, is in the way the game is viewed by its billion fans. A visitor from 1983 would find that each of the 48 major league franchises plays its home games in domed stadiums limited to 10,000 seats. For lack of words our visitor would comprehend, these are essentially television studios and season-viewers are limited to five live dates per season on a lottery basis. The rest of the 184-game schedule is available through various subscription plans for Compu-Den viewing. Compu-Den, perfected more than 20 years ago by combining all existing microchip technology, features three-dimensional telescreen with 1,000-channel capability, total stereo and a communications center backed by a computer 20,000 K memory. Unlike 1983, when people had to leave their homes for work, shopping and other daily chores, Compu-Den is the basic tool for more than 75 million home office workers. The almost total depletion of world petroleum sources made travel by private and conveyance almost obsolete, particularly when oil certificates replaced gold as legal currency in 2058.

Some things have remained the same, however. Clubs still conduct spring training in Sunbelt areas. The Phillies have trained for more than 50 years in the lovely Gulf Coast resort of Orlando. Western Division clubs work out on the craggy but mild seacoasts of Arizona and Nevada.

Was it some long forgotten French philosopher who wrote, "The more things change, the more they remain the same"?

When Eartha Washington, the nation's second black woman president, throws out the first ball to formally begin the Phillies 200th birthday party, fans will begin looking ahead to the events of the year 2083, just as they must have done in 1983, in a long-gone relic named Veterans Stadium.

When you have finished reading this, please enter Code 3 and stand by for the daily radiation level readings and a memory update.

“Back to the Future...Yet Again! Three More Times” Three Views of the ‘Three Laws’

By *Richard Fuller*

The first time I noticed two wildly different movies that had the same title, I asked a media-wise acquaintance why. Because you can't copyright titles. Welcome to a media-mix threesome—the third one wildly different than the first and second—all with the same title:

1. *I, Robot* (Bantam Spectra) by Isaac Asimov; a collection, first published in 1950, of nine sometimes loosely connected stories by science fiction behemoth—his monstrous output includes, what, 500 books?!?
2. *I, Robot: The Illustrated Screenplay* (ibooks) by longtime Asimov friend—the revered and spikey Harlan Ellison.
3. *I, Robot*, the 2004 movie, starring Will Smith, its screenplay originally called “Hardwired” but the final version based on the title by Isaac Asimov and including some of his characters' names but none of their personalities.

Movie superstar Will Smith's photograph dominates the cover of the reissued Asimov paperback. Atop that photo is the inevitable cliché, “Now a Major Motion Picture.” Smith fans who buy the book after seeing his (Major?) flick are probably going to feel like, to quote Smith in his pic, an “Asshole!” Totally different worlds, *sf* fans! Asimov—and Ellison—fans probably skipped the picture.

Let me correct a “lie” in item 3 above: “based on the title by Isaac Asimov.” Asimov's publisher/editor “took” that title—this was, remember, a first collection of stories—from a 1939 story by Eando Binder. So please don't recycle “You, Jane, Me, Tarzan” jokes about that title and blame them on Asimov. Wonder what Isaac would have called it, if given the choice.

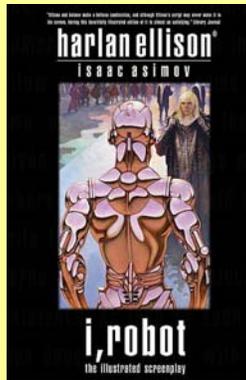
Asimov was never interested in writing for the movies and always turned down offers to adapt his works or write original scripts. He considered himself exclusively a word-smith, not an image maker. He did adapt the screenplay for *Fantastic Voyage* (1966) into a novel that sold well in hardback and even better in paperback. But it was too loyal to the script, he thought. Because he's such a swift writer—a scribbler robot?—his version came out six months before the movie version! In 1987, he published the novel *Fantastic Voyage II* which was more Asimovian.

Asimov's longtime friend Harlan Ellison loves movies, if not the men in charge of the picture biz. He was hired to adapt *I, Robot* and worked on the screenplay from December 1977 to December 1978. Holy--unlucky?--thirteen months! Harlan was obviously devoted to his friend's stories and

ideas. Many scripts are “tossed off” in six weeks. Alas, Ellison's mesmerizing screenplay, which Asimov loved, was turned down by a moron at Warner Bros. (Harlan accused him of having the intellect of an artichoke) and has never been made



I, Robot
by Isaac Asimov
Bantam Spectra: New York, NY
November, 1991
(originally published in 1950)
\$7.99, paperback, 301 pg.



**I, Robot:
The Illustrated Screenplay**
by Harlan Ellison & Isaac Asimov
Illustrations by Mark Zug
ibooks: New York, NY
April, 2004
(originally published in 1994)
\$14.95, trade paperback, 288 pg.

into a motion picture. Alas. Listen to Harlan and hear your own heart break: “Because the screenplay is the story of Susan Calvin, I wrote it with Joanne Woodward in mind as Susan.” Credit Harlan with being a great casting director.

All three versions of *I, Robot* share Asimov’s “Three Laws of Robotics:”

1. A robot may not injure a human being, or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.
2. A robot must obey the orders given it by human beings except where such orders would conflict with the first law.
3. A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the first or second laws.

All three versions of *I, Robot* are similar in that their most important mechanical robots are assembled by humans into creatures who are nicer—better?—than human beings. Mind you, there are lots of nasty ones in the Will Smith movie. And robot Sonny, who’s very human indeed, is apparently the killer of Dr. Alfred Lanning (played by the great James Cromwell), a very different Lanning than the one in Issac’s book or Harlan’s screenplay. Sonny isn’t in Asimov’s or Ellison’s *I, Robot*.

Asimov’s book begins with an Introduction in italics. An unnamed “I” character, who writes feature articles for Interplanetary Press, mentions Lawrence Robertson, founder of U.S. Robot and Mechanical Men, Inc., “the strangest industrial giant in man’s history.” He also mentions Dr. Alfred Lanning, of U.S. Robots, who long before taught then 20-year-old Susan Calvin and “demonstrated” the first mobile robot equipped with a voice. After earning her Ph.D. in 2008, Susan joined United States Robots as a “robotpsychologist”—the first ever of her kind. Now that she’s about to retire at age 75,

reporter “I” wants some human-interest info from her on robots.

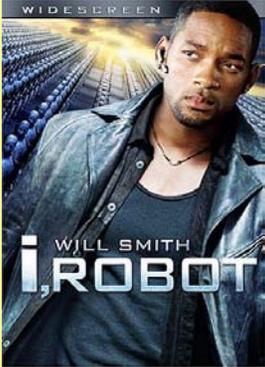
“They’re a cleaner better breed than we are,” claims Dr. Calvin in what would seem to be Asimov’s “moral” arc for his stories. Susan then recalls Robbie, who was assembled and sold in 1996 as a nursemaid to a little girl. The nine stories that follow favor ideas first, character/story arc sometimes a distant second. You may find robots Robbie, Speedy and Herbie more memorable than “flat” characters Gloria, Donovan, Powell or Susan Calvin. Was this Asimov’s intention?

Robbie co-stars (stars? even though he doesn’t speak?) as nursemaid to eight-year-old Gloria in the first story, “Robbie.” Gloria’s bitchy mother Grace wants to get rid of Robbie. Her father George (do their three G names mean something?) doesn’t want to. Guess who wins? (In his screenplay, Ellison changes little Gloria into little Susan Calvin. Her father Edward is a mid-level employee of U.S. Robots Corp. who’s treated very badly by cranky Dr. Alfred Lanning, which enrages little Susan and makes her later join the company to destroy it. Her stepmother Belinda—Susan’s mother Stephanie died giving birth to her—is a devoted member of Church of the Moral

Flesh and “morally” against Robbie. You’ll probably anticipate that something bad will happen to good Robbie.)

Speedy co-stars in the second tale, “Runaround,” with Donovan (of the red hair) and Powell (of the brown mustache) who have been on Mercury for only twelve hours and are already in danger. Eventually, Speedy saves their lives. (In the screenplay, Ellison puts Susan on Mercury with the two guys. Speedy and Susan save them.)

Herbie, who can read minds, co-stars with and eventually humiliates—but not intentionally—Susan Calvin in “Liar!” Frosty Plain Jane Susan has begun to defrost and even wear makeup be-



DVD Release Date: Dec., 2004
Starring: Will Smith, Bridget Moynahan, Alan Tudyk
Director: Alex Proyas
Screenwriter: Akiva Goldsman
Rated: PG-13
Studio: Fox Home Entertainment
Special Features: Commentary by Profs & Goldsman; still gallery; “The Making of *I, Robot*,” Fox’s Inside Look: Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Robots, and Elektra

cause of young, attractive Milton Ashe. Mindreader Herbie knows exactly how Susan feels about Milton. Herbie tells her Milton loves her. Oops. (Ellison's version is the closest to the Asimov original.)

These three stories (the best of the nine?) are effectively integrated into Ellison's screenplay, which has a story arc (Susan's life, of course) and memorable characters.

Both Asimov and Ellison agree that Ellison used four of Asimov's nine tales in his screenplay. If you read—or reread—both collection and screenplay, you might “play” robot Sammy (as in Spade) and see if in fact four tales are recycled into the script.

In Harlan Ellison's screenplay, the most enjoyable of the many I've read, all his characters, including those not from Asimov's stories, are “round.” He borrows his story arc from possibly the greatest film ever, *Citizen Kane*. Reporter Robert Bratenahl, of *Cosmos Magazine*, attends a funeral for Stephen Byerley, First President of the Galactic Federation, who has been atomized and put in a vacuum bottle. Then Bratenahl is astonished to see 82-year-old Susan Calvin—who is almost never seen by anyone. He tries to get past her two guards for an interview. Can't.

Bratenahl has a harder time meeting and interviewing Susan Calvin than the reporter in *Citizen Kane* trying to find Rosebud. He urges his girlfriend, surgeon Bernice Jolo, to contact Dr. Calvin. As a kid, Bernice went with her surgeon father when he operated on Calvin, a connection that will help her boyfriend see and interview Calvin. Bratenahl goes into outer space to interview oldsters Donovan and Powell about Susan. He goes to South America where Susan rediscovered the Lost City of the Andes and now lives. He thinks he's found his “Rosebud” when he examines several photographs of Stephen Byerley (Susan's Once Upon a Time lover?) and decides Stephen was immortal. Considering the title, you've probably guessed who/what Byerley is/was. How he started out adds a soulful resonance to the screenplay that is in none of the Asimov stories.

In late 1987, Ellison's screenplay was serialized in three issues of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction*

Magazine, winning the 1987 Reader's Award. The trade paperback version of the screenplay is a great read because Harlan probably reworked his earlier versions into what he calls a novel-screenplay. Dare I admit that I enjoyed reading this version more than the behemoth Asimov's tales?

Another dare: I love watching Will Smith in his “Major Motion Picture” even though Harlan and the late Isaac would probably hate it.

Sorry, Isaac & Harlan, but I scintillate watching Will saunter with a Saturday Night Fever sass. He plays cop Del Spooner (is that name supposed to be nudge-nudge wink-wink?), who's “prejudiced” against robots. Del relentlessly tracks dangerous robot Sonny (Alan Tudyk), the apparent killer of his surrogate father Dr. Alfred Lanning (James Cromwell). Smith carries this movie as if it were a feather. And Alan Tudyk's voice for Sonny is perfect. Isaac&Harlan would hate the casting of young, conventionally pretty Bridget Moynahan who is, both as actress and Susan Calvin (!), “flat.”

The power of Smith's movie is how his hatred for robots in general is aimed at Sonny and is eventually transformed into a lovingly understated brotherly love. Sonny's wink, which he “quotes” from Smith, is a major plot point leading into the film's major action sequence. Smith, of course, finally winks back. Unless you're on the dark side of the moon, your moist heart should be winking at both.

While each version of *I, Robot* is unique, my heart aches over this line on the back of the screenplay: THE GREATEST SCIENCE FICTION MOVIE NEVER MADE! But hold you stars! This is Science Fiction! So let's travel to an alternate universe where that movie was in fact made. Harlan and a still-living Isaac sit together in a movie theater, eyes damp, both agreeing with Leonard Maltin's movie “Bible” giving it four stars and hymning Joanne Woodward's Academy Award for her many faces of Citizen Calvin.

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.

Book Review: *Going Postal* by Terry Pratchett

By Edna Stumpf

To say that Terry Pratchett is God is frivolously stating the obvious. Well, he's a small-g god anyway, far more productive than the pantheon of dilettantish divas he has personally invented. His 29 *Discworld* fantasies are imagined with such intensity and complexity that many of us who vacation there have signed up for retirement property. More fun than a trailer park, let me tell you.

This is the genuine Creationism. This is where Death is a straight man (he has a kitten and a horse named Binky). This is where there's a gargoyle on the police force who specializes in stakeouts, a witch who channels bees and swills sugar-water. There are zombies and werewolves and dwarves and trolls, and they all mostly get along except for the elves, who are infected with celebrity-itis. Orlando Bloom has a lot to answer for.

It's the funniest fictional alternate reality since P.G. Wodehouse and just as British, though a lot less Public School. It's so funny that it has been known to break through to serious, which is what great comedy does.

I just want you to understand, folks, that although I can tell you about *Going Postal*, the book is a single corner of the Bayeux Tapestry. It's the tenor part of the *Ring Cycle*, the fourteenth segment of the second season of *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*. You gotta love it, but you'll love it more if you do the research.

Career scoundrel Moist von Lipvig—that's by no means the weirdest Pratchett name on record—is about to be hanged for assorted flim-flam. Although the Patrician or supreme ruler of the City of Ankh-Morpork (warned you) does not come through with a pardon, he does have a sort-of posthumous job offer: hike over to the moribund post office and get the mail moving. There, Moist

finds a skeleton staff of near-psychotics, roomfuls of undelivered letters and a very focused, very patient golem with orders to keep him from skipping town.

The Patrician (whose name is Havelock Vetinari, and he looks it) knows his criminals. Lacking morality, dedication or a sense of self, Moist is suited to government work.

Omigod, the adventures. Discovering that the official motto has been vandalized ("glom of nit"), Moist extorts stolen letters from a local hairdresser. He whimsically delivers a few bits of ancient correspondence and causes some riots. He attracts media attention. Media attention is something he can use.

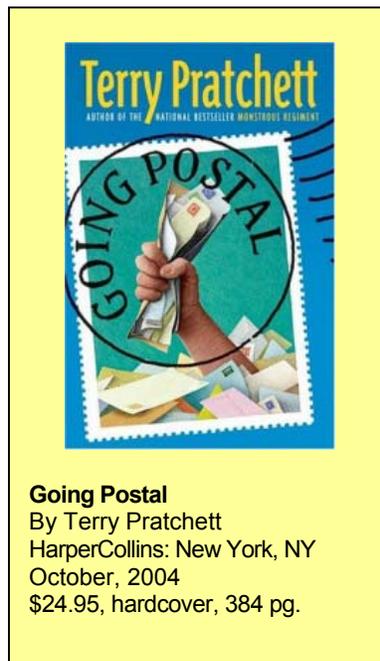
Old post office hands ask for their jobs back once Moist dons the traditional gold suit and winged hat of the Postmaster. He takes on a few pensioners and newly unionized golems as letter carriers and personally provides a pony express service when the rival clacks system (think telegraph, think computer, think both

at the same time) experiences breakdowns.

The clacks Grand Trunk, as the Patrician knows, has been financially raped and almost disabled by industrial pirate Reacher Gilt and his cronies. Gilt is so flamboyantly evil that the public loves him. Unfortunately, he really is evil. He's not above arson or hiring a killer banshee. And I lied when I said all the Discfolks get along. Nobody likes a banshee. The Assassins' Guild ("Hold Up Someone Else's Head With Pride") snub them.

Oh, there's a love interest. Her name is Adora Belle ("Spike") Dearheart. She manages golems and doesn't trust Moist. When he kisses her "it's like kissing an ashtray, but in a good way."

Pratchett's many extravagant characters vie for center stage. It seems only fair to spotlight one



per volume, and in this case I have chosen Stanley, the obsessive-compulsive postal clerk whose lifelong devotion to the collecting and categorizing of pins is only occasionally interrupted by fits of violence. (Even when roused, Stanley can be placated at the drop of a... you know.) When Moist invents the postage stamp, he knows the right man to oversee the project. And we observe Stanley put away childish pins, grow a new obsession and don a shirt proclaiming "Ask Me About Stamps!" The portrait of a geek in paradise is heartwarming. There are cunningly designed illustrations.

Suffice it to say that Postmaster Von Lipwig does so well that the Patrician gives him a promotion. This is not the best thing that happens to him. The best thing is finding a purpose for his skills of misdirection, a reason to wheel and deal, a pressing though peculiarly selfless need for the ill-gotten gains he has buried in a field. (He recovers

these after publicly calling on the gods for help. He requires money to rebuild the ravaged post office. It leads to a great Ankh-Morpork religious awakening.) Moist von Lipwig, in other words, finds out that he's been born to serve others. He discovers the dignity of labor. It's very disorienting, but the desire to kiss Spike again keeps him honest. "I've fallen into good ways. I keep thinking I can give it up any time I like, but I don't."

Plus, he rescues a cat from a burning building.

We already know that Terry Pratchett is one of the great clowns of our time. But I'm beginning to think the son of a bitch has a soul.

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.

"The Romano Fafard vs. the Enterprise or How Québec Beat Star Trek"

By Caroline-Isabelle Caron

Editor's Note: This paper was first presented at the Popular Culture Association meeting, San Diego, CA, March 24, 2005.

Since the very beginning of network television in the 1950s, the United States have dominated the field of sci-fi television, as it had movie serials in prior decades. Cult television, and especially cult sci-fi television, is consequently dominated by American and made-for-Americans television productions, starting with the most important influence that is the original *Star Trek* series (*TOS*). Nevertheless, this influence is mediated by the inevitable format these cult series must take in order to be broadcasted outside the United States: in non-Anglophone countries, American television must be either dubbed or sub-titled. As such, for example, outside the United States, *TOS* is not always "*Star Trek*"; it is *Patrouille du Cosmos* in Québec and France, *Raumschiff Enterprise* in Germany and Austria, or *Uchuu Daisakusen* in Japan.

Dubbing, especially, has a strong cultural impact on an original American cult television show. Not

only does it necessarily transform the dialogues from the source language to the target language, but it also changes much of this dialogue as it transposes American cultural referents into relevant or understandable referents in the target, non-American culture. As such, it also means that entire storylines may be altered—in the case of *TOS*, episodes shown in Germany were re-edited—and characterization may be changed—in *Patrouille du Cosmos*, Kirk is frankly sexist rather than simply flirtatious. As a result of the changes resulting from the translation and dubbing process, the original American television show is no longer an "American" show. It has been made relevant and culturally significant to the target culture, because dubbing necessarily transfers and nationalizes meaning.¹

Nevertheless, dubbing has its well-known pitfalls. Lags in synchrony are the most obvious flaws of the process and inevitably lead to a strong comedic impact, no matter how well the dubbing is done. Even in French and Spanish-speaking countries, where dubbing has become a near scientific technique, gaps in synchrony, either in

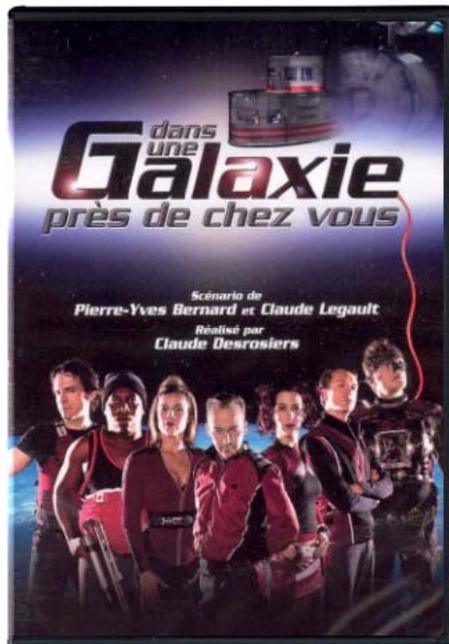
speech or in movement, still occur. Add to those, gaps in meaning, such as untranslatable cultural referents (or storylines based on puns), the matter of untranslatable jokes (or puns added where there were none), and the fact that older shows tend to age very badly (sets, costumes, hairdos...), and the result is cult sci-fi shows that are unintentionally comedic, and that constantly challenge the viewers' suspended disbelief.

As a result, American cult sci-fi television shows are prime targets for satire. Outside the United States, parodies of those series are numerous and serve not only as a means to critique American culture, but also American foreign policy. The result is many television series and movies that are at heart satires of American cultural products, mostly dubbed television and movies such as the *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* franchises. Yet these satires are successful series and movies onto their own. In the last decade, many of these have become cult phenomena themselves in a non-American cultural context. Here lies the true interest of these parody series and movies; most surpass in success, in popularity, and in audience the American cult phenomena they satire. Furthermore, they become cult phenomena regardless of the original cult status of what they satire. Though there are many examples of these parody successes that have emerged since the 1990s, this paper will mostly focus on one specific case.

Dans Une Galaxie Près De Chez Vous ("In a Galaxy Near You"), was from 1999 to 2001 the only original science-fiction series on Québec television. All others were dubbed American, Australian or European productions. During its four seasons and 65 episodes, it primarily targeted the adolescent viewers of the youth cable network Vrak.tv, though it had originally been planned as for adult audiences. *Dans Une Galaxie (DUG)* is a space adventure, slapstick comedy satire that obviously

spoofs *Star Trek*. It tells the adventures of Capitaine Charles Patenaude and his rag-tag crew aboard the Planetary Federation spaceship *Romano Fafard* in the early 2030s. Their mission: to find a suitable planet to which the human population (5 billion boneheads) can escape Earth, now deprived of its ozone layer, and to go "where the hand of Man has never set foot."

It spoofs *TOS* on several levels. Not only does *DUG* have an opening narration and the *Romano Fafard* a familiar vessel shape, it also boasts a multicultural and mixed Canadian crew and stereotypical storylines. The valiant crew of the *Romano Fafard* is composed of Bob Dieudonné Marcellin, the fat and jolly pilot of Haitian extraction; the beautiful councilor Valence Leclerc, who is having an illicit love affair with the captain; clumsy medic and tinkerer Pétrolia Stanesslofski and her android, prone to dramatic mechanical blow-ups; brave operations officer and half alien Flavien Bouchard; and finally the evil English-Canadian science officer Brad



Spitfire. Together they fight off strange diseases, dangerous asteroids and aliens, discover unknown brothers and Jedi apprentices and generally fail to find the right planet for humanity.

For all its derivative content, *DUG* manages to have a long list of its own internal themes and running jokes. In the *DUG* universe, humans are stupid and hated creatures that foster violent reactions in alien species (such as vomiting). Brad Spitfire, as the clever but awkward evil English-Canadian, tries to foil the mission in every episode. As a result, he is either stopped by the crew as they knock him unconscious with a collective judo chop ("Non Brad!") or manages to save the vessel and the crew despite everything. In the process, *DUG* criticizes and satires Québec and Canadian culture, politics and institutions. For example, after being denied Federal government funding for its third season because the show, set

in space, “was not Canadian enough,” the opening monologue was altered to make the *Romano Fafard* a construction of the number one world power in the 2030s, Canada! The crew’s uniforms also now harbored a Canadian flag, and Brad Spitfire—whose ethnicity had never been fully revealed before; he could have been American—was now a proud English-Canadian.

After a slow start in the first season, the series popularity ballooned in its second year, only increasing to the point that by the end of the series in 2001, *DUG* boasted true cult status, with fan clubs and fan websites presenting fan-fiction, fan art, fan movies and even fan music videos underscoring the love affair between the Capitaine and Valence.² It did not take long for the cast of the show to be constantly stopped in the streets or after theatre plays in which they star, by fans young and old dressed up in *DUG* uniforms or asking to be given a “Non Brad!” It would not be an exaggeration to state that presently *DUG* boasts more fans in Québec than *Star Trek* itself.

DUG’s popularity by the end of season four convinced its authors Claude Legault (Flavien) and Pierre-Yves Bernard to start working on a movie adaptation.³ Released in the summer of 2004, it was an instant and immense success. Within its first month, over two millions viewers lined up to see in cinemas across the province. This may seem like a small attendance until compared to the total Québec population of 7.4 million.

The passage from the small to the big screen was long and arduous. The writing team went through six different drafts in order to make a scenario that would not only satisfy the fans, but also make sense to the non-familiar.⁴ The breadth of the series and its fan base allowed for the movie to be much less derivative than its mother series. To secure an even wider fan base, the entire series was released as a four-volume DVD set. The movie, rather than recycling storylines from cult

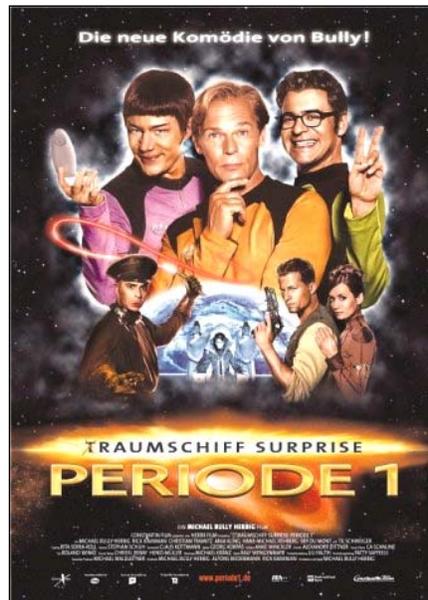
sci-fi television and movies, focuses on *DUG*’s own themes and running gags, expanding on characterization to sustain the storyline. What derivative references there are in the movie are intentionally obscure and will surely go unnoticed by the youngest viewers, such as references to old Montreal Canadiens players. *Dans Une Galaxie Près De Chez Vous – Le Film* opened to a huge press buzz and a premier gala the likes of which had never been seen in Québec. Merchandizing also accompanied the movie’s opening. *DUG-Le Film*’s double-DVD edition contains large selection of the media coverage of the movie’s premiere. A second movie is due out in the winter of 2006. Though this phenomenon had no precedent in Québec, it is by no means unique. Since the 1990s, there are several other examples of similar sci-fi satire series and movies gaining cult status.

There are obvious parallels in Germany and Turkey, notably.

In the mid-1990s, one of the most popular television series in Germany was the sketch show *Bullyparade*, the brainchild of Michael Herbig. One of its regular

segments was *Unser (T)Raumschiff*, a gay spoof of *TOS*. At the heart of this spoofs are puns and play on words. For example, though *Raumschiff* means “star ship” in German, *Traumschiff* means “cruise ship.” These near-weekly slapstick sketches featured Kapt’n Jürgen Thorsten Kork (rumor is he’s not really gay), Mr. Brigitte Spüick (quite the queen) and Schrotty (whose name is a derivative of German slang for “scrap heap”). The skits are short and simple, telling the (mis)adventures of a gay crew prone to having tea and crumpets on the bridge.

The series was made into a movie literally by popular demand. In March 2002, Michael “Bully” Herbig asked the viewers of *Bullyparade* to vote online for the one sketch they would most like to see made into film. More than a million (34% of all who voted) chose *(T)Raumschiff*.⁵ In the summer 2004 (again), the movie *(T)Raumschiff Surprise: Periode 1* (“(Astro)Cruiser Surprise: Episode 1”) was



released to great fanfare (and merchandizing).⁶ In its first ten days at the box office, it not only attracted 3.4 million viewers, it surpassed the third *Harry Potter* film. As a spoof of *TOS*, *Star Wars: Episode One* and *The Fifth Element*, and as such more derivative than *DUG*, it depicts the brave crew of the *Starship Surprise* as it attempts to thwart the evil leaders of Mars as they try to invade Earth. In the process, the movie criticizes German institutions and fosters a debate on the depiction of gays in German media.

The summer of 2004 also saw the release of the movie *Gora: Bir Uzay Filmi* ('Gora: A space movie') in Turkey.⁷ As a spoof of *Star Wars*, *The Fifth Element*, and *The Matrix*, it openly criticizes Turkish institutions; in fact it is only because it is set in the future and on another planet that the movie escaped the censors. It too was an immense success, gathering just under 4 million viewers in Turkey only and enjoying a full European release. In Germany, *Gora* was dubbed "The Turkish (T)Raumschiff"⁸

The point of this short overview was to point to a popular phenomenon that is almost completely unknown in the US: the emergence of non-American cult television and cinema that, though originally spoofs, evolve into cult phenomena onto themselves and largely surpass the popularity of the original American cult sci-fi that they spoofed. They are autonomous cultural products with wide-scale cultural effects. They show, beyond

any doubt, that American culture is being resisted in innovative ways, with great success!

Endnotes

1. For more on the dubbing process, see my "Translating Trek: Re-writing an American Icon in a Francophone Context", *Journal of American Culture*, 26.3 (Sept. 2003), p. 329-55.
2. See, for instance, *DUGPDCV Online*, <http://www.dugpdcv.fr.st/>.
3. Pierre-Yves Bernard and Claude Legault, *Dans une galaxie près de chez vous : Scénario du film... et autres stupidités* (Montréal : Les 400 coups, 2004), p. 7.
4. Bernard and Legault, p. 7-8.
5. Thierry Attard, "(Astro)Croisière Surprise : Première Époque," *Objectif Cinéma* (2005), http://www.objectif-cinema.fr/article.php3?id_article=3271/.
6. (T)Raumschiff official site, http://www.periode1.de/kino_dvd/periode1/index_flash.php/.
7. *Gora* official site, <http://www.gorafilm.com/>.
8. For example see this online critique, <http://www.karlstorkino.de/index.php?RUBRIK=5&Document=21&ID=749&version=/>.

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Men Are from Earth, Women Are from Celestis: Issues of Sex & Attraction in Paul Park's *Celestis*

By Matthew Appleton

A number of years ago, I first read Paul Park's Nebula-nominated novel, *Celestis*. Set against an allegorical backdrop representing either the European colonization of Africa, and the destruction it wracked upon its natives, or the current plight of today's Third World, Park's novel concentrates on the relationship between its two main characters: Simon Mayaram, a colonial politician from Earth, and Katherine Styreme, an native Aboriginal who in order to become human underwent a series of medical procedures and currently takes a cocktail

of chemicals. In chronicling their relationship, Park succeeded in his attempt to address "some of the difficulties ordinary people have when they try to communicate based on incompatible frames of reference" (Gevers). Yet, at the time I read *Celestis*, I came away with something far different: an examination of how men are sexually attracted to women and how that attraction affects their behavior. I recently reread the novel, which only reinforced the impression I originally gleaned from it.

To be sure, Simon is not an ideal representative for the male half of the species. At the very least, he shows apathy toward outward racism, as illustrated by his silence when a number of colonists make racist remarks about the Aboriginals, whom they call “abos.” In addition, he is different from nearly all the other men on Celestis—a recent émigré from Earth, and quite possibly the last, he’s a curiosity who is called, “the most interesting single man left in the territory” (Park, 38). Simon’s most troubling aspect though is the violent, potentially misogynistic, streak he shows when he sleeps with Natasha Goldstein, the daughter of one of the more powerful colonists on the planet. In their first act of intercourse, he “felt calm. Happy, yet detached, though he did have an erection in a modest sort of way; it looked so wizened and so strange” (Park, 55). Clearly, he’s just using her for sex and isn’t interested in her in the slightest. However, this positively benign in light of what follows.

After taking a respite, he initiates another act and when she resists—explicitly saying “no” in the process—he rapes her. In its aftermath, Park tells us Simon feels “ashamed, uncomfortable,” (Park, 55) but we’re not told why. Despite his discomfort, it quickly becomes obvious that he doesn’t feel as though he didn’t do anything criminal, maybe just immoral. When Natasha turns away from him on the bed and starts sobbing, Simon has the gall to ask, “What’s wrong?” There’s plenty wrong! He just raped her, and even more disconcertingly for Natasha, her body betrayed her during the rape; in the middle of the act she actually shuddered with pleasure. Having spoken with rape victims, it’s one of the most horrifying things that can happen during the act. There’s no way to defend what he just did, and this callous questioning compounds his crime.

Yet, despite his serious flaws, he displays a deeper truth: men often find themselves attracted to women purely on the basis of physical appearance. When Simon first sees Natasha, a real human, he examines her with “appreciation,” but mostly seems to notice her flaws:

“Her black hair was wild around her face and shoulders... Her features were ir-

regular; Simon imagined that someone seeing her in profile from the right side and the left might think he was looking at two different women... Her nose and mouth protruded forcefully.” (Park, 47)

Compare this to his reaction when he first saw Katherine earlier at the same party, where Katherine is described as “a miracle of art: her glossy red-black hair, her beautifully sculpted face” (Park, 40-41). Even though he ends up sleeping with Natasha at the party, it comes as no surprise that he ultimately lusts after Katherine. Yet, his attraction to her isn’t quite natural, even in this environment. When he mentions to Natasha how lovely Katherine is, she’s almost stunned, but not because she feels threatened: “Natasha gaped at him and then she laughed. ‘You poor jerk,’ she said. ‘It’s alright—I forgot where you were from’” (Park, 48). The fact that Natasha slept with him shortly thereafter shows what little she thought about his feelings concerning Katherine.

As is the case with Simon, Katherine is hardly an ideal surrogate representative for all women, even when you set aside the fact that she comes from an alien, asexual species. Her outward appearance is the result of “a million dollars worth of split genes” (Park, 42) and plastic surgery. In addition, a cocktail of pills and chemicals individually tailored just for her shapes whom she is:

“... they had since been refined to give pleasure, to regulate mood, to block up neural passages, to smooth unnatural fluctuations in the patterns of the brain, to reproduce, as far as it was possible in alien creatures, the experience of human thought.” (Park, 30)

This begs the question, how much of her true personality really shows through? We cannot be sure, but as we get to learn more about her, we find that Katherine is an overtly devout Christian and is fascinated with the Earth and its culture—she goes so far as to call European music and the news of Jesus Christ “enormous gifts.” Yet, she is far from enamored with humanity as a whole:

“You carry with you a treasure which you cannot understand, at the same time you are debasing and enslaving our people and polluting and ravaging our land.” (Park, 51)

Despite an earlier fascination with Simon, most likely because he actually spent time on Earth, unlike nearly the rest of the human inhabitants of Celestis, it certainly seems highly unlikely he will get very far in an attempt to seduce her.

All that changes when a group of altered Aborigines attempt to launch a rebellion and kidnap Katherine and Simon. Certainly, he initially feels a suddenly strong connection to her because they are sharing the same harrowing ordeal, yet even then he still thinks of her foremost in terms of her beauty:

“He shuddered. Yet, how beautiful she was. And surely at that moment she was close to him in her mind. Surely they felt the same helplessness, the same isolation, the same fear.” (Park, 67)

But despite the supposed bond that he feels with her, they don't seem to actually do much in the way of connecting or getting to know one another. We see her offer a number of prayers and fret about her medication, which she no longer has. They talk about what their captors might do to them and a little about Simon's experience on Earth and why he left. However, beyond that there's very little else they talk about. It's hard to believe that real love comes from a relationship where two people spend so little time truly getting to know and understand each other.

Even with this lack of true understanding, it's not hard to pick the moment that Katherine shows her first true sign that something is wrong. There are very early signs that the medication she needs is quickly losing its effectiveness, but these are ambiguous signs that leave room for a lot of interpretation, especially for Simon. A wonderful example of this occurs when he offers to bring her close for physical comfort, and she accepts; he views it as an act of bravery on her part when it

just as easily can be a reduction in modesty brought about by her withdrawal. (This also wonderfully illustrates Park's effort to show the problems of communication when the individuals lack compatible frames of reference.) Nonetheless, the ferocity with which the first undeniable sign that the medication is wearing off is almost disconcerting. After getting beaten by her captures, Katherine suddenly lashes out verbally:

“Simon thought she was praying until he heard the words. ‘Cock,’ she said. ‘Cock suck,’ and then a few more bits of hesitant obscenity that sounded so strange in her hoarse voice. ‘You can suck my shit,’ she said almost conversationally.” (Park, 72)

It's an outward symbol that the beast inside Katherine, her true self withheld by a cocktail of drugs designed to close off areas of perception in her mind, is about to break loose.

That beast reveals itself fully when Katherine finally succumbs to the temptation to have sex with Simon. It's a temptation she finds herself fighting shortly after her foul-mouthed outburst: “She had an itch near her navel, and she ran her fingers down under the waist of her pants, over the bare skin. Ah, God,” she breathed, and pulled her fingers back” (Park, 85). It seems that her faith pulls her back from committing a sin—religious thoughts immediately come to her after she pulls her fingers away—but as the effectiveness of the drugs continue to wane, her ability to resist the urge decreases. She manages to fight off her sexual urges once more (Park, 98-99), but her desire to remain chaste ultimately fails and she initiates sex with Simon. For a brief moment, Simon transcends his previous brutish behavior and tries to tell her to stop. However, it's not out of concern for her well-being:

“And he could feel himself shrinking underneath her fingers, losing his erection in the crude transition between fantasy and fact. He stared down at her face, suddenly conscience in his body of a knowledge that had only been cerebral to this

point—something he read about in books before he came here. These people were a one-sex species. Katherine, when she was born, had had a penis similar to his.” (Park, 113)

His self-control has nothing to do with the fact that she is no longer “herself” and that as a result she is doing something she wouldn’t have even considered just a couple days earlier. No, he’s experiencing what many people do when confronted with a transsexual being, they stutter, pause and start questioning their own sexuality. In this case, Simon displays an almost homophobic reaction—quickly losing his erection and stopping her before this she-male overcomes his sexual hang-ups.

However, as his initial experience with Natasha showed, Simon gives in easily when a woman displays an insistent sexual desire. Ironically, he actually says, “Katherine, stop” at one point, but she ignores him, continuing to fondle and caress him. He allows himself to succumb to the pleasure, but with an even greater irony, the foreplay comes to an abrupt end when he notices she’s crying. He then notes “the grief and anger in her eyes” (Park, 115) and the act stops before its completely consummated. However, the sexual act is capable of creating intense emotional binds that otherwise may not form, and barring that, it certainly impacts one’s thinking, as Simon demonstrates when reflecting upon what happened: “Sex means something, he thought. No matter what it is, it always means something” (Park, 119). It means the next time she asks for sex—with a simple murmuring of “Fuck me” (Park, 132)—he complies willingly and wholeheartedly, this time consummating an uninterrupted act.

During that act,¹ Park continues to make it clear to the reader that Katherine is continuing to revert to her Aboriginal mental state and that she’s already changed significantly since Park introduced her in the novel. While Simon engages in foreplay, she thinks about how she no longer finds

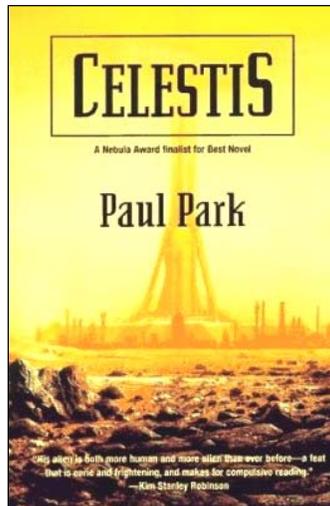
solace in the human music she committed to memory. She conceptualizes her changes as following a staircase downward, contemplating the metaphysics regarding a descent into hell, which she feels the staircase represents. She also thinks about her father and a sermon from Saint Robert Bellarmine. The two “enormous gifts” she spoke of so fondly earlier no longer offer her solace or defense against her sexual urges. This and the lack of attention toward the sexual act itself are the byproduct of her continuing reversion to her natural Aboriginal state; a state which depends far more on her mental perceptions of the world rather than her physical sensations.

When Katherine and Simon are freed from their captors, but must return to civilized society from a barren wasteland on their own, those changes become more discernable. During their trek, Aboriginal thought processes begin for the first time, she starts thinking of Simon as “the man,” (Park, 143) and when she starts seeing the world—as she previously understood it—as “the ghost world,” (Park, 146) she starts seeing him as something more sinister:

“There he was. A black dog... with brutal stupid eyes. All black, black in every part, except the red tip of its penis as it shifted its leg.

“This animal, this brute incapable of reason or compassion, this creature had raped her when she was most exposed. Again and again. How was it possible? What had brought her to this place?” (Park, 146)

Even though her senses are in flux, she knows enough to know that what he did was wrong. She sees him for the brute he is—the brute that refused and/or failed to notice that she was not herself and as a result debased her. Yet, as important as this revelation is, it’s just a harbinger of the thoughts she later has about him, after her natural senses sharpen and she gains an ability to sense what the



future holds—something common to her people in their natural state—her perception of her future with him looks bleak indeed: “You will die, she told herself. You will starve and die. You will burn in the hot sun. The black dog will fuck you again and again” (Park, 193). Who will die: the man-made Katherine, the real Aboriginal version asserting itself for the first time or the corporeal being called Katherine? Although we don’t know at that moment the exact meaning of this metaphorical vision, it’s obvious that Katherine’s end will be unpleasant in one fashion or another.

As her perception of Simon changes, so literally does Katherine. Because she is now using areas of her brain suppressed by drugs and chemicals her whole life, she gains insight into the world she never had before:

“This new sense still revealed itself in visual images, which seemed at times flatter and flimsier than normal sight, at times heavier and more solid. Projection and anticipation gave form to these images, while memory gave them mass, and sometimes she relied on one more than the other, the future more than the past.” (Park, 174)

As part of that change in perception, Katherine actually visualizes the imperfections of human language and sees for the first time just how limited the human perception of the world is. In addition, she actually senses the chemicals exiting her system, and she revels in it:

“She was burning the resources of her body, burning the fat, burning the chemicals away. It was a painful fire. But still it pleased her to exhaust herself, to render herself down.” (Park, 204)

As her true nature asserts itself, she shows the need to revert physically as much as possible. When Simon leaves her unattended near a set of tools, she rips out her tear ducts, cuts nearly all her hair off, and starts removing teeth and fingernails before Simon returns and stops her (Park, 242). In doing so, she suddenly looks much more

like her unaltered kin. The horror he feels when he sees her this way is only compounded when he sees unaltered Aboriginals for the first time.

When Simon first encounters the unaltered inhabitants of Celestis, he is trying to find water to carry while on their journey. With him is Martin Cohen, a priest who was originally friendly with their kidnappers, but is now trying to get back to safety with the two of them. Having seen Aboriginals before and aware of a strong likelihood they will encounter them, Martin tries to warn Simon about what they will probably witness. Still, it comes as a shock when Simon finally encounters them:

“Disgusting also was the second Aboriginal, who knelt down in front of the first, nursing on his ‘penis,’ a bloated organ maybe nine inches long. It was stiff, engorged with blood, and certainly the motion, the methodical sucking of the second Aboriginal, was evocative to the human witness; Marayam held his flashlight beam on the conjunction of that lipless hold, that fat red prick.” (Park, 250)

While Martin did note that this is not actually sex, something “more like eating or lactation” (Park, 248), the scene still evokes a homophobic response. In fact, Park tells us that Martin, who expected to run across something like this and knows its real meaning, finds himself disgusted, and, more tellingly, embarrassed at seeing it:

“The last time he had been here he had come along, and it had not been nearly as embarrassing. There was something about watching it next to another man.” (Park, 250)

We’re not given the opportunity to find out the depth and feeling of Simon’s reaction to what Katherine might become, because at that moment she suddenly runs off again. However, it’s safe to assume that the homoerotic nature of the Aboriginal act only gives added urgency to Simon’s quest to return Katherine to the state he originally met her in. This urgency is reinforced by the fact he

has fallen in love with her—something even Martin has noticed.

Yet, the priest sees something Simon does not, that his love is not the result of deep understanding; rather it is borne out of pure physical attraction. When she runs off on her own a second time, Martin tells Simon:

“You’re thinking about that girl. You’re thinking about her and wondering where she is, and you’re thinking she’s not so different... I saw her—no. She’s a different kind of organism. *It’s only the way she looks that makes you feel the way you do.*” (Park, 187 – *emphasis added*)

This isn’t the only insight Martin has into Simon—he senses that Simon is deluding himself about the reality of the overall situation and actually tells him, “The world is so confusing, and we have our way of dealing with it which is to block it out. Block out nine-tenths of it” (Park, 203). Ironically, Simon blocks out this and Martin’s previous insight into their relationship, and this blocking out helps keep Simon focused on saving Katherine. Eventually, Simon is able to return her to doctors that will be able to restore her to the woman he thinks he loves, but what does all this mean?

If you accept the premise that Katherine represents all human women, then her transformation back to her natural state symbolizes the feminist struggle. As her mind opens up to all the vistas previously denied her by the patriarchal society, she becomes aware of sensations and ideas previously denied—perceptions that man-made drugs and chemicals previously robbed from her. Furthermore, because it’s so unnatural, she attempts to destroy the reconstituted body constructed solely for the visual pleasure of men. Katherine becomes a feminist ideal: a woman who has completely thrown off the chains put on her by a patriarchal society:

“But she was in control now, and she felt in control. After all, it was not a foreign part of her that allowed her mind to move from one thing to another, to make chains of reasons. The conquerors had not given

her a new mind. This had always been a part of it, but there was more.” (Park, 219)

Sadly, it’s a short-lived victory, one that is overturned completely when Simon “saves” her by getting her medical care and is foreshadowed earlier in the novel when she sees her future with Simon.

For his part, Simon truly believes he loves her and thinks he is acting in her best interests at the end of the novel. However, it’s clear that his lust for her and his desire to restore her “original” appearance drive his actions. Furthermore, his devotion to saving her causes him to disregard her pleas to leave her alone. Aside from a potential homophobic reaction he displayed earlier, his desire to bring back the woman he first met suggests a fear of an unleashed feminine libido, and a fear that for Katherine sex and love are no longer bound together. By implication, this means she is willing to engage in sexual activity with any man; this notion must be as unpleasing as the homophobic one he displayed earlier. There is another element at play here: Simon as savior. When she first tries to set off on her own without him, we see a hint of this:

“For the past day her thoughts has been disordered, and he had led her as a mother leads a disordered child. Perhaps she had gone out to urinate and then got lost... It was easy to imagine her helpless and in danger” (Park, 179).

This need to be her knight in shining armor is only reinforced when he makes a prayer to God stating that he will not fail her if he finds her again (Park, 180). In his eyes, he is proving his love for her by rescuing her from a situation she cannot—actually refuses to, but Simon sees no distinction—escape from on her own.

In the end, Simon and Katherine’s relationship is a depressing one. He never takes the time to try to understand her as she reverts to her Aboriginal state; he just takes control of the situation and ignores her attempts to clearly communicate her wishes to him. This single-minded determination remains at the very end, even after her “healing” process begins. The book closes with Simon dis-

cussing her treatment with her doctor, and during their talk Simon tells her that they love each other. It's a strong statement considering she never actually told him that.

The incompatible frames of reference Park wanted to explore made this lack of understanding possible. Coincidentally, this was only highlighted to me when I reread Rachel Pollack's review of *Celestis* in *The New York Review of Science Fiction*. Pollack, herself a transgendered individual, was stuck mostly by the way the novel addressed notions of transsexuality. While elements of that did work its way into my reading, it's clear that as a heterosexual male I focused on something else entirely.

Endnote:

1. Park never really describes the sexual acts, which leads to some ambiguity on what was

possible. Early in the book, we are informed that Katherine does not have a vagina, that her father thought it unnecessary (Park, 42). However, we eventually find out that this is nothing more than the ill-informed speculations of a couple rubes, which is made clear later when Park explicitly states that she has one (Park, 226).

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Movie Review: *Sin City* "Welcome Back, Sir Lancelot"

By Jessica Darago

It took me about 14 hours to be able to speak in full sentences about *Sin City*. The movie is a visual assault, steeped in magnesium-bright gore and full of acts of extraordinary villainy and its corresponding heroism. But what dumbfounded me was what I'm forced to call a philosophical core that I could not quite grasp or define. After hours discussing the movie with others who had seen it, I could finally describe the compelling and disturbing implication I saw beneath the glamorously ugly surface.

The plot (or, rather, plots, for there are three, although they are ultimately all the same) is no challenge to describe: Three men mount crusades against corrupt authority in order to protect or avenge the women they love.

"Welcome back, Sir Lancelot. Damsels in distress are down the hall and to the left."

It would thus be easy to dismiss the movie's hackneyed—er, I mean "classic" plot from that description. That is, it's easy if you haven't seen the thing. Although each of the leading men is,

essentially, a knight-errant—Hartigan (Bruce Willis) is the last clean cop in the dirty city; Marv (Mickey Rourke) is a Frankenstein's creature, misunderstood and desperate to be loved; and Dwight (Clive Owen) is a P.I. on the run from past mistakes—these men aren't just filling the shoes of the lone-wolf, outside-the-law hero. They are violently, unflinchingly, and utterly without compromise asserting that this is the only acceptable definition of "male": He is a loner. He is driven by duty. He is dedicated to justice. He never, ever hurts a woman. And he is, for the most part, alarmingly chaste.

"Courtly love? Aisle 9, next to the holsters."

Each of the film's villains, on the other hand, fails to meet this definition in two significant ways: all work in packs, or at least in pairs, and all of them are dedicated, for one reason or another, to the abuse, exploitation, and destruction of women. Cardinal Rourk (Rutger Hauer) and his pet cannibal/choir boy Kevin (Elijah Wood) revel in feasting on prostitute flesh. The cardinal's

brother, Senator Rourke (Powers Boothe) indulges and protects his son (Nick Stahl) in his fetish for 10-year-old girls. The Rourke brothers in turn use their power and influence to further each other's ambitions, a pair of symbiotic parasites on the city. Finally, Jackie Boy (Benicio Del Toro) beats his sometime girlfriend Shellie (Brittany Murphy) and, it is implied, any woman who crosses his path, but only when he has his posse to back him up. For their grave faults, the villains are not merely killed, but each is first castrated, either literally or metaphorically, by one of the heroes (except in one memorable instance, in which a villain is killed via penetration by his own surrogate dick).

It was tempting to me, as a woman well-marinated in feminist lit-crit, to take a pass on this theme, dismiss it as retro at best, and just review the film in terms of its visual merits (which are many) and its questionable acting (more on that below), but this isn't the first time in recent years that this theme—the attempt to redefine maleness in a post-feminist world—has appeared in popular cinema. Feminism—by which I mean belief in “the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes” (as *Merriam-Webster* succinctly defines it)—as a movement devoted a great deal of time to defining that which is not heterosexual maleness, and although the ongoing struggle for equality is indisputably just and necessary, in destroying traditional assumptions about male and female, it seems to have left many straight men at a bit of a loss. “If I'm not [this], and I'm not the only one who's [that]...then what the hell am I?”

Human beings are attracted to answers, categories, labels, and structures, and in my experience, at least, men are even more attracted to these than are women. The gray world of shifting identities and ideals, while probably a more accurate view of reality, is for many people an uncomfortable one. Every day, the mod-

ern world asks us to make decisions based on input that comes in vibrant Technicolor by using our Cro Magnon brains that only see in black and white.

Therefore, the literally black-and-white landscape of *Sin City* is appropriate not just as a tribute to the heyday of film noir and to Frank Miller's comics but to the very worldview of the film. These characters live in a black-and-white world.

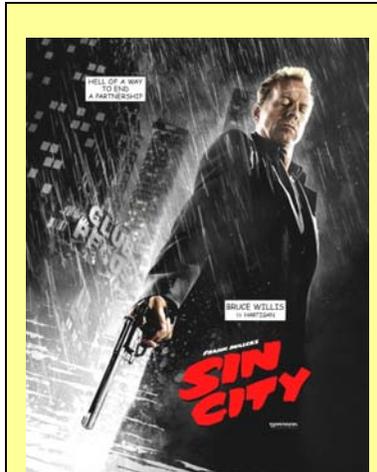
Although the characters (whores and strippers, ex-cons and rogue cops) may individually be morally suspect people, there is never any question of where justice ultimately lies. The goal is just. The path is clear. “At every turn,” Dwight tells us, “I did what I had to do.”

Of course, the film doesn't deal with the consequences of this type of maleness in the everyday world. Each crisis in the film has a definite beginning, middle, and (sometimes very definite) end. But it never addresses what follows the victory. What do you do with yourself when life settles down and your ladylove is at work waiting tables (or, er, something) at the bar? How do you live from day to day as an archetypal lone wolf? More importantly, how

does one lone wolf deal with another? If you form a pack, you become what you despise. Yet that is, inevitably, what humans do. Two lone wolves come together. They fight. If both live, a hierarchy is formed. Power is redistributed. Corruption takes root. And if you think this all sounds like yet another movie, you're right. It's *Fight Club*, which demonstrated that lone-wolfism ultimately bears the seeds of its own destruction.

Sorry, guys. It's been tried before, and it's just not the answer.

All of that cultural criticism aside, *Sin City* is one of those movies that I, personally, could only recommend to certain friends and with lots of ca-



Starring: Bruce Willis, Jessica Alba, Rosario Dawson, Benicio Del Toro, Mickey Rourke
Directors: Robert Rodriguez & Frank Miller
Screenwriter: Frank Miller
Rated: R
Studio: Dimension Films

veats and disclaimers. First and foremost, it is singularly violent, singularly gory. As one of my friends described it, with only a touch of hyperbole, "It makes *A Clockwork Orange* seem suitable for children." Although the gore is mostly black and white (and yellow), a man's head being smashed to pieces is a man's head being smashed to pieces no matter what color it is. And herein lies the sub-caveat for males only: as mentioned above, castration is a major theme. Dicks get shot off, cut off, and torn off; sometimes more than once on the same character. Be prepared to cross your legs. A lot.

Secondly, although I'd say there are only two truly horrendous bits of acting overall, this cast isn't exactly the Royal Shakespeare Company. There is a faint whiff of Limburger hanging over most of the performances. Among all of the actors in the movie, only Mickey Rourke seems to have completely grasped the fact that overwrought dialogue requires underwrought acting. Willis and Del Toro have the general gist, and, admittedly, the very nature of Wood's character precludes grandstanding. Two of the actresses (Jaime King as Goldie/Wendy and Devon Aoki as Miho) are actually model/actresses, although each of them does a better job than one would expect (and neither is by any stretch the worst performer in the film). The award for worst actor in this film goes surprisingly to Alexis Ble-



del, who at times can't seem to handle walking and speaking simultaneously and portrays the least convincing teen prostitute ever put on film. Her performance begs the question, is there another actress working today who is more completely asexual than Bledel? The real payoff to her casting is for *Gilmore Girls* fans; in her last scene, she is chatting on her cell phone with her mother, an amusing nod to the fact that this character is the anti-Rory Gilmore.

That aside, for the moviegoer whose real passion is the special effects, this movie is, in the common tongue, "A MUST-SEE!" Rodriguez has brilliantly and reverently reproduced the comic-noir style of the book on the screen through judicious use of contrast and rotoscope. There has never been anything quite like it in live-action film.

In short, this movie is not subtle. It is not for the sensitive soul (or, for that matter, the sensitive male genitalia). If examined too carefully, it yields a mere straw man of a solution to the problems of modern manhood. But it is, for all of that, a hell of a thing.

Jessica Darago is the former Senior Editor of The Fractal: Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy. By day she works in medical publishing; by night she critiques everyone else's writing but rarely does any of her own. This submission to Some Fantastic, she hopes, marks the beginning of the converse trend.

Letter to the Editor

I can't answer your question about how J. K. Rowling named Voldemort ("On *Harry Potter*" in Issue 2), but I can weigh in a bit on the Goblins. From what I understand, they're not so much oblivious as they just don't care. As long as you don't try to steal from them, they really don't care if you're an escaped convict or what. They seem to run the bank rather independently from anything, including the Ministry.

Of course, I could be wrong. :)

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