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Fall 2011

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SFRA Review

A publication of the Science Fiction Research Association

In this issue

Announcements

EDITORS' MESSAGE

New Opportunities Await

Doug Davis and Jason Embry

OUR NEWEST ISSUE of the *SFRA Review* arrives a little late, but we believe it is worth the wait. We begin with a rousing message from our President concerning several future collaborations that will energize our members as well as attract future contributors from outside our normal haunts. Our Vice President and Public Relations Director discuss our forays into Social Media and muse on how many people *like* what we do. And our noble Executive Committee strives to solve the Print-On-Demand concerns of many of our members.

We also have a Feature 101 piece by our newly-minted Managing Editor, Lars Schmeink. For those of you who do not know Lars, he is a lecturer at the University of Hamburg (Germany) and recently co-founded the first German language association for research in the fantastic. He is pulling double duty by also serving as president and editor-in-chief for its own members' publication - the *ZFF*. We are all happy to have him join our staff. His feature, "Video Game Studies 101," is a thoughtful and informed survey of video gaming studies' academic history, a brief discussion of the key concepts of this particular area of study, including but not limited to narratology and its effect on immersion and interactivity, as well as a rumination on dystopian/utopian tensions in some of the more popular SF games on the market. Thanks to Lars, those who know little about this exploding area of scholarship will gain insight into the popularity of this field. And for those who already list "gaming" as one of their interests, this feature will be an engaging read.

We have a number of nonfiction reviews in this issue, including a review of Bould and Vint's *The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction* by our illustrious treasurer, Patrick Sharp. You will also find a review of *The Postnational Fantasy: Essays on Postcolonialism, Cosmopolitics, and Science Fiction* which was co-edited by our Vice President, Jason Ellis. Finally, Pawel Frelik, our gracious host from this past summer's annual gathering in Lublin, Poland reviews Seo-Young Chu's *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep? A Science-Fictional Theory of Representation.*

We are a little light on fiction reviews for this issue, so please contact Jim Davis if you are interested in writing for future issues. Finally, please check out the media reviews in the final review section that cover several of the big-budget SF films from this past summer like *Cowboys & Aliens*, *X-Men: First Class*, and *Rise of the Planet of the Apes*.

Despite the small number of fiction reviews, we have generated another issue that is almost *double* the size of previous issues. We hope you enjoy!■

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Rebooting

Ritch Calvin

ACCORDING TO the urban dictionary, the term "reboot" has a number of meanings, including restarting a computer when it behaves in an erratic manner. Another meaning is "to start anew with fresh ideas in a way that is consistent with the principles of the original." At the Sunday morning business meeting in Lublin, Poland, one of the themes that emerged from the membership was dissatisfaction with the current state of the website. As was pointed out, the current website design was primarily based on the original website design, but simply transferred to the new site. However, as each of you knows, the innovations in web communications and capabilities continue to change rapidly. In order to remain relevant and useful, we need to transform along with the world around us, including the technologies in which we are immersed. Another major theme from the business meeting was the future of journal publication. Anyone who follows the publishing industry, in any of its forms, knows that the publishing model is also undergoing rapid change. So, perhaps we need a reboot, a restart of the operating system, a new approach that remains faithful to our mission.

To that end, on November 18 and 19, 2011, the Executive Committee met in Kent, Ohio. The meeting was hosted by Vice President Jason Ellis and the young cat, Miao Miao. While we had a very full agenda, we managed to work our way through the entire thing. You will find the minutes from the minutes contained within this issue of the *SFRA Review*. While we covered many

issues, I will only mention a few here.

One of the topics was, of course, the annual conferences. Our next annual conference will be hosted in Detroit by Steve Berman. Please be sure to send your panel proposals and/or paper proposals to Steve as soon as you can. All the information about the conference, including the Call for Papers, can be found at: <http://sfradetroit2012.com/>. The following year, the SFRA will join forces with the Eaton Conference in Riverside, California. The conference will be hosted by Patrick Sharp, Sharon Sharp, and Rob Latham. In 2014, we will join forces with WisCon in Madison, Wisconsin. WisCon is one of the great, long-standing conferences, and I look forward to taking part in the Tiptree Award ceremonies. As you might recall, last year, the Tiptree Motherboard was awarded the Thomas D. Clareson Award for Distinguished Service, so we look forward to working with all the great folks in Madison. At present, we do not have a conference director for 2014, so if you would be interested, please contact me.

As another part of our efforts to become more integrated into the web of science fiction scholarship, we have begun creating liaisons with other professional organizations. Our first formal affiliation emerged from the suggestion of, and efforts by, Eric Otto. He created an affiliation with The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE). As a result, each year, the SFRA has a dedicated, standing panel at the ASLE conference, and the ASLE has a dedicated, standing panel at the SFRA conference. So far, the affiliation has worked well—as anyone who attended the ASLE/environmental panels can attest. Since then, through the efforts of Chris Pak, we have formed an affiliation with ASLE-UK. I would like to thank both Eric Otto and Chris Pak for their efforts. If anyone has a relationship with another professional organization and would like to create a similar affiliation, please let me know. I believe that these kinds of interconnections can only bolster the profile of the SFRA and the relevance of the organization as a whole.

We also discussed the *SFRA Review*. For one, we know that the shift from a print format to an electronic format has been difficult. In past years we had the generous support of the University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire, and the efforts for Jan Bogstad. When UW-EC withdrew its subsidy last year, the SFRA had to find a way to fill the gap in the cost of producing and distributing the *SFRA Review*. Since we had already been discussing the possibilities of a e-publication, and since other publica-

tions in the field are already moving in that direction, the SFRA EC decided to shift to an electronic form of the *Review*. As people have begun to renew their memberships for 2012, we have discovered that the number of people opting for an e-only subscription and the number of people opting for an e+print version is roughly split, 50/50. However, we also know that those who subscribed for the 2011 year did so with the expectation of receiving a printed version of the *Review*. Therefore, for any person who would like to receive a printed version of the *SFRA Review* numbers 296, 297, and 298 (i.e. the remainder of the 2011 calendar year), we will use a print-on-demand service and send you those issues.

In addition, because the form of the *Review* has changed dramatically, so have the needs of the Editors in Chief. Because of the need to handle e- and e+print versions of the *Review*, because of the need to integrate a number of new options into the Review, we are looking to add a Managing Editor position. The new Managing Editor will handle requests for back issues, communications with the Treasurer regarding subscriptions, print-on-demand requests, distribution of files to printers, conversion of electronic files into alternate formats, and integration of advertising. After consultation with the EC and full and enthusiastic approval of the Editors in Chief, I am pleased to announce that Lars Schmeink will serve as the new Managing Editor of the *Review*.

Finally, we spent a lot of time discussing the SFRA website. Although we were already aware of (some of) the shortcomings of the current website, the voices at the Business Meeting in Lublin were loud and clear: it's time to change. Indeed, nearly half of the meeting in Kent was devoted to discussing the website. In the near term, you will notice some front end changes—that is, in the appearance of the website. We will make the site less cluttered, streamline and consolidate the menus, integrate the various social media, and so on. If you have any suggestions, please send them along to me.

However, we will also be making changes to the back end—that is, in the way in which the site works behind the scenes. We will make improvements in the way in which it handles member profiles; we will streamline how the site integrates membership data and journal subscriptions. For the most part, these changes will be invisible to members, but they will facilitate operations for officers, simplify the journal subscription processes, and will make things such as the Membership Direc-

tory easier for members to use.

The year 2012 may not bring about the end of the world as we know it, but we do hope that it will bring about some much-needed and useful changes to the SFRA interfaces. ■

VICE PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

They Like Us!

Jason W. Ellis

GREETING, ALL! In this column, I would like to report on our successes in social media and reissue the call for inviting new members into the ranks.

I am happy to announce that the SFRA Facebook page has taken off like gangbusters! Since November 2010, we have more than doubled our "Likes" from 91 to 220. This does not tell the whole story though. We have also seen 6,767 page views this past year. I believe that this means that some folks are finding us while looking for other things than "Science Fiction Research Association," and it raises awareness about the organization with folks who may or may not be as invested in SF as many of us are.

Other interesting facts about our presence on Facebook: Women and men are nearly equally represented as fans (47% vs. 46% respectively). All age groups above 18 are significantly represented as "Fans" of the SFRA page. Finally, many of our external referrals originate from sfra.org followed by Google and the Detroit conference website (http://sfradetroit2012.com/). This final point indicates that people who find us online are interested in connecting with the organization through social media such as Facebook.

As the Facebook page continues to evolve and develop, I hope that it will become an important tool in our organization's arsenal of attracting new members and continuing our important discussions year-round in cyberspace. I will conduct another survey in the near future to find out how effective Facebook is for attracting new members and to gauge its importance to existing members.

We can thank R. Nicole Smith, the SFRA Publicity Director, for much of the SFRA's growth on Facebook. Also, she has continued to leverage sfra.org as an important component of the organization's online presence through regular updates to the website.

On the Twitter side of the social media universe, Andrew Ferguson has taken over the reins of @sfranews.

This Twitter feed will be a feed dedicated to SFRA organizational news, promotion of member accomplishments, and other important events related to the organization. If you are on Twitter and have something that you would like us to carry on our feed, be sure to mention @sfranews in your tweet. This will alert Andrew to your news, and he will retweet your message on @sfranews.

A final bit of social media news: the SFRA is now on Google+ (search for us or go to: https://plus.google.com/ ■

SFRA PUBLICITY DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Social Media @ the SFRA

R. Nicole Smith

ALTHOUGH WE MAY HAVE all read stories, seen movies or even imagined opportunities to initiate and reciprocate instant communication locally, nationally and globally with our fellow earthlings, we never could have imagined that this would have manifested in terms such as "Twitter" and "Facebook."

Not only are these social mediums easily accessible, but they are also free. Imagine attending a national and regional conference and tweeting about a new text you've just learned about or a dynamic presentation you just heard on your research topic. Or—what if you have a great picture of yourself presenting at a conference or participating in a book signing event and posting it on Facebook? The value of tweeting or posting this information is that it will not only reach SFRA members but also a wider audience beyond our membership who will become increasingly aware of the academic and pedagogical activities of our organization's members. Even if you didn't have time to share this information during the year, now would be a great time to update SFRA members and friends on your 2011 research activities, SF courses you taught or completed this fall semester, and your plans for the new year.

If you have not already done so, please be sure to "like" or join the SFRA Facebook page. There is a link on the home page of the SFRA website. Also, sign up for our twitter feed "@sfranews." ■

Composting Culture: Literature, Nature, Popular Culture, Science

ASLE-UKI–THE UK-IRELAND BRANCH of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment–invites proposals for its 2012 biennial conference. The conference will take place between Thursday 6–Sunday 9 September, 2012 at the University of Worcester, supported by the university's Institute of Humanities and Creative Arts.

Recent work in ecocriticism largely recognizes the complexity of ecological science and philosophy and its social and political dimensions. This has resulted in an increased emphasis on paradigms and perspectives that embrace that complexity: posthumanism; biosemiotics; discordance; consilience etc. Consequently, with regard to its objects of study, ecocriticism might increasingly be characterized as a multidisciplinary act of ecological intervention that has fermented an array of possible reference points–globalization, science, neuroscience, spirituality, etc.–into an expanding range of cultural texts, stretching far beyond the literary canon of romantic nature writing that shaped ecocriticism in its early years.

This conference will explore the extent to which correspondences between more complex ecological understanding and cultural forms might be evident, most particularly, in non-canonical texts, or previously unexplored linkages between theories and texts, or in the upcycling of established literary or cultural forms, movements, writers etc. Conceptualized by Jed Rasula as a process of composting where "interanimating tendencies" converge into the possible emergence "of newness, of the unpredicted," this "nutritive sensibility" has recently traversed cultural theory and practice: in Harriet Tarlo's identification of a conjunction between experimental poetics and radical landscape poetry; in the "new nature writing" of "Edgelands" (Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts), or places like Essex, which acknowledges the blurring of human-nonhuman, rural and urban; even in popular culture, for example in a recognition of technology's perhaps paradoxical ability to inculcate both deep ecological awareness and a scientific sense of nature as process (as aspired to in Bjork's recent *Biophilia* project). Keynote speakers will include:

- Thierry Bardini, Université de Montréal, author of *Junkware*, examining "junk" in nature (DNA) and culture (science fiction) alike
- Jed Rasula, Helen S. Lanier Distinguished Professor at the University of Georgia, author of *This Compost: Ecological Imperatives in American Poetry*
- Molly Scott-Cato, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff, Green Party UK Speaker on Economics, author of *Green Economics*

Along these lines, we now invite papers and proposals that can offer, most particularly, a focus on hitherto neglected or unexplored interconnections between authors, texts, genres, and cultural forms. These might relate, but are not restricted to, the following themes:

- Recycling, composting, fermenting, or junk as cultural tropes
- Consilience: ecological science and cultural/literary texts
- "New nature writing"
- New perspectives on Romanticism
- Green media and popular culture
- Ecopoetics/landscape poetry
- Posthumanism
- Postcolonialism or globalization
- Biosemiotics and Zoosemiotics
- Biotechnology and ecotechnology
- Ecological discordance or complexity
- "Edgelands"
- The canon and ideas of cultural value, etc.
- Rhetoric, metaphor or narrative
- Environmental (in)justice
- Nature, post-nature, "second nature"
- Toxicity
- "Social Ecologies of the Imagination"

Individual papers should be 20 minutes. Please send a title and 250 word abstract to David Arnold: d.arnold@worc.ac.uk and John Parham j.parham@worc.ac.uk by the deadline, Wednesday 29 February 2012. Further details–including registration costs and accommodation–will be circulated in the spring. Our intention is to offer video conferencing, allowing for the participation of international delegates unable or reluctant to travel. The conference is to be located in the historic city of Worcester and accommodation will be reserved at one of the university's two campuses. The university is in easy reach of diverse landscapes: the Geopark Way,

which explores 700 million years of geological history; or the River Severn floodplain grasslands and rare meadows. Considering the interaction between human settlement and environment, one might take a walk on the Worcester and Birmingham canal; or visit the Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with its rich acid grassland and grazing sites, views of the Welsh Marches, iron-age earthworks, commons, and ancient semi-natural woodlands; or the local ancient orchards maintained by volunteers. With this in mind, at least one half-day excursion, with a choice of locations, will be included in the conference schedule. There will also be a conference dinner at The Fold, a local eco café and arts and design centre, and the focus for a range of activities relating to sustainable development. ∎

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Meeting Minutes

Susan A. George

Executive Committee Business Meeting, Kent Ohio Meeting Minutes, meeting convened at 9:35 am

I*n attendance: Ritch Calvin (President), Jason Ellis (VP), Patrick Sharp (Treasurer), Lisa Yaszek (Immediate Past President), and Susan A. George (Secretary)*

I. SFRA Annual Meetings
 a. SFRA 2012 Detroit, MI: Steve Berman says that registration has been a bit slow, but his updates on the listserve are keeping folks well informed and the call for papers has apparently been doing its job.
 b. SFRA 2013 Riverside, CA: Patrick said that the joint conference with Eaton is coming along nicely but the hotel for the actual panels has been changed because of the technology limitations of the older hotel. The Eaton folks and Patrick are still working on the special guests, budgets for the conference and guests, and other logistics.
 c. SFRA 2014, Madison, WI w/ WisCon: the EC is excited about the chance to represent an academic track at WisCon. Some of the issues to date include SFRA finding its own hotel near the one WisCon will occupy and fill for the event and arranging sessions for the conference. An SFRA member/volunteer will probably need to manage the SFRA sessions at the conference.
 d. SFRA 2015, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: is still online, but no major developments to discuss.

 e. SFRA 2016, Stony Brook, NY—do we want to select a location this far out? After some discussion, we decided planning this far out was not a bad idea. So, Ritch brought up Stony Brook because they are building a convention center that could easily house a conference and there are also other hotels near the campus with suitable mass transit. Ritch will let us know how things proceed and we will keep Stony Brook on the back burner for 2016.

II. SFRA website
 a. Around 10 am the above discussion was interrupted so we could have a Skype meeting with Matt, the current webmaster, about the state of the SFRA website and the concerns raised by the membership at the Poland conference. While Drupal can support the functions we would like, such as streamlining the SFRA directory, the version we currently have cannot. The amount of work needed to bring it up to the standards the organization now needs is far more than Matt can or should be expected to do. After our discussion with Matt, we decided we should take the agenda out of order and deal with the various website issues. The bulk of our meeting, in fact, focused on needed changes to the website and the way it functions.
 b. After reviewing the websites of a range of other organizations, we started refining what we need to do to both the front end of the site to make it more visually appealing, user friendly, and precise as well as needed changes to the back end that will allow the organization to better track members and communicate with members, promote conferences, and compile a directory. Several solutions were suggested:
   i. Lisa suggested that she might be able to present the website refit as a senior project for the Georgia Tech students. We decided that Lisa will explore this possibility while we continue with other avenues.
   ii. Another suggestion was to pay Matt to rewrite the front end now to take care of some of the problems people mentioned at the Poland conference and to make the website more user friendly while we continue to get bids to fix the back end. A vote was taken and the motion was carried with a vote of 4 to 1.
   iii.We then discussed the revisions to the back end. Ritch noted that he needed more specific information to get effective bids. The first bid

we received based on the information he had was $8000-12000. Jason took notes on all the changes/functions we need and would like so he can write a proposal that Ritch can then use to obtain more bids as Lisa works on the Senior Project idea to keep our options open.

    iv. We examined a number of websites from similar organizations, i.e. professional, academic organizations. We looked for aesthetics, style, layout, user functionality, etc.

    v. We then discussed a new SFRA Logo, one that would take less room on the website. In the end we decided to commission a graphic design student at Georgia Tech who had done some work for Lisa to come up with 3 possible designs. Lisa will contact the student and offer her $150 to design the three new logos for possible adoption.

    vi. With this plan in place and the morning gone, we adjourned for lunch at 12:20 and reconvened around 2:10.

III. Financial Matters

  a. Treasurer's Report: Patrick reported that SFRA has about $60,000.00 and all payments to journals are complete for 2011. He also noted that membership renewals were going a bit slowly with only about 30 renewals to date though he expected a sharp increase as the conference date gets closer.

  b. Status of Grants: Patrick reported that all grants had been paid to date and that there are still funds for future grants. Patrick had a grant request from Batya Weinbaum on behalf of *FemSpec*. The monies would be used to publish a volume of creative works that would be sold to generate revenue for the journal. After discussion of the proposal the EC decided to award *Femspec* $500 to begin the first phase of the publication process.

IV. Formal Affiliations

  a. Currently we have formal affiliations with ASLE, Eric Otto serving as liaison and with ASLE-UKI, Chris Pak as liaison. These affiliations are beneficial for both organizations in terms of bringing in conference participants and promotion.

  b. We then discussed other possible affiliations and who would approach the organization. Although we made no final decisions other affiliations included Utopian Studies and PCA.

  c. Listserves? Jason suggested that we ask Otto and Pak if they would administer crossposting on our and ASLE and ASLE-UKI's listserves by setting up an account at wiz.cath.vt.edu. We agreed this would be a good idea.

V. Social Media:

  a. Facebook Page: On behalf of Jason and Nicole, Jason reported that since November 1, 2010, SFRA Facebook page has gone from 91 Likes to 220 Likes for an increase of 129 or 142%. However, we have had some turn over, because the New Likes over the past year equals 140 Likes. This means that some people have found us via Facebook, clicked Like, but later clicked Unlike at some point. These could be spammers or normal Facebook folk—there is no way for us to tell. In addition, we have received a 183% increase in post feedback and our posts have received a total of 6,767 views over the past year. Moreover, the Facebook page gets more traffic around Spring Break, immediately before and after a conference, and after the fall semester begins. We should keep this in mind going forward, because we can communicate with Steve Berman and future conference organizers to also post their updates to the Facebook page. The Facebook page also shows that our members are mostly from the United States followed by other English-speaking countries. Another important indicator is that most external referrals come from sfra.org with about a third of that number coming from Google and then the Detroit conference website. Overall, Jason, Nicole and the EC see this as a success story, one that allows us to reach more potential members with information and invitations to join.

  b. Twitter (Andrew Ferguson): Jason reported that he would like to add Share/Tweet links on SFRA.org and ask Matt how hard it would be to add it. He would like to talk to Andrew about starting a M-F Tweet-a-day feature on SFRA News (@sfranews) twitter feed. The EC thought it was a good idea, but wondered if M-F was too often. Jason and the EC will look at this in more detail as part of the website redesign.

  c. Other social media? Google+, others?: Jason has created a Google+ page for SFRA so we can post conference calls and the link to our website. He suggested it be part of the Sharing feature mentioned above if it can be done easily. If not, we should certainly include it in the site redesign.

VI. Membership

  a. Current numbers, as noted above, 30 folks have re-

newed their membership for next year. Patrick and Susan are still working on way to streamline the gap in communication that occurs with Susan sending out the notifications that are then sent to Patrick so she can't keep track of who has renewed and who hasn't. Susan will send out several reminders to the listserve to renew and then begin sending out individual inquiries. The last step will be sending the packets out by mail. Since the cost of postage, especially international postage, is only going to climb this year we are asking all members to provide an email address for future notification and renewal. Patrick has found that with the addition of PayPal most international members use that to renew their membership any way.

b. Patrick has sent the lapsed membership list to Susan and after the steps above are taken those individuals will also be contacted by email.

c. We briefly discussed how the back end redesign of the website Drupal could streamline not only the Directory, but make it much easier for the Treasurer and Secretary to keep track of the membership and renewals.

d. Should we continue to print a paper version of the Directory? The EC feels that printing and mailing a hard copy Directory is getting far too expensive and it rarely gets out in a timely manner. The online directory would be, the EC hopes, far more accurate and up to date.

e. Should we have a pdf version online or print-on-demand? Most of the committee feels that a pdf version that could be printed out by members was a sensible solution for those who like to have a hard copy. As to print-on-demand, that would also be an option, but someone would need to set it up and manage it. At this point and until the website is redesigned an online, printable Directory seems like the most efficient and cost effective option.

VII. Publications

a. *SFRA Review* (how do we proceed now that we have lost our institutional support): Since 2011 members paid for the *Review*, do we have an obligation to provide print copy?

i. The EC decided we do have an obligation to provide it to those who want it, but just how we would do it is still very unclear. Perhaps a print-on-demand arrangement. This discussion lead to . . .

ii. Do we need a new managing editor for the Re-

view? This was a hard issue. While the EC would like the *Review* to become an online publication bringing it and the SFRA into the 21st century, the current editors of the *Review* weren't really expecting to deal with such a dramatic change and feel they don't have the time or expertise to deal with this new development. So after much discussion, the EC decided to find/appoint a new managing editor for the *Review*. Ritch will contact individuals discussed by the EC and an announcement will be forthcoming. The EC briefly discussed the terms of the position. It will be a three year term staggered with the editor's terms. Individuals will be eligible to serve as managing editor for more than one term.

iii. Advertising in the *Review* (raised in Poland): After brief discussion the EC decided the advertising in the *Review* wouldn't cause any serious issues as long as the advertisements were appropriate to the goals and mission of the organization. Ritch said he would look into the cost of ads in similar publications so we could set up a fee scale.

iv. Back issues of the *Review*: The EC has authorized Jan to send several boxes of Review back issues to Lisa for storage.

b. Discussion of SFRA Anthology: The EC discussed updating the SFRA anthology that was edited by Patricia S. Warrick, Charles C. Waugh, and Martin H. Greenberg in 1997. Several of the EC members feel like another print, heavy, big anthology is not really needed at this time, but as a whole we like the idea of a publication that would be useful and promote SFRA. We decided to do several things. First, Susan would contact Patricia Warrick, since she was the volume's main editor, to inform her that we are considering updating it and to see if she would be interested in being involved with the editing or at the very least get her blessing for the project. Second, Susan would contact Amazon about their e-publishing to see if that would be a viable, quick, and useful way to update the volume.

c. Publication of 101 articles in book format?: We decided that we would prepare and present a proposal to McFarland regarding publishing the Review's 101s in a book form. Following the last McFarland SFRA book there will be 4 editors, the editors of the *Review*, Doug Davis and Jason Embry, Ritch Calvin, and Susan A. George. Ritch will take lead on this project.

VIII. Awards
  a. Pilgrim Award winners and publications: All Pilgrim award winners receive lifetime membership and that includes the journals, so the question arises, now that there are two tiers, should they get the subscriptions in print? Though the e-versions would be the easiest, it seems rather strange to give someone lifetime membership and then restrict it. After some discussion, we tabled the issue until we see what the Pilgrims prefer and if we are going to do print-on-demand with the *Review*.
  b. Redesign of some of the SFRA Awards? Although we have enough for the near future, there is some concern about the design of the Pilgrim and Pioneer awards. Because we no longer have the original artwork, the last engraving batch showed significant degradation of the design, degradation that will continue as more copies are made. After looking at the fairly geometric designs, the EC decided we should be able to find an artist to copy them for us so that fresh artwork instead of copies of copies could be used.
      i. Mary Kay Bray award: well, we all laughed when we saw it and the Student Essay award was even funnier. Since we are having the artist create 3 designs for the new SFRA logo, we thought that we might possibly be able to use the other 2 to redesign these awards. Therefore, we tabled the redesign issue until we see the commissioned designs.
IX. Other Old Business: None
X. Any new Business
  a. Beverly Friend asked if SFRA would help with funds to host a soirée for the academic track of World-Con. Because SFRA would be listed as a sponsor but mostly because of Beverly's contributions to the organization, funds were granted
XI. At about 5:54 pm Ritch call for adjournment, and we all hardily seconded the motion. ■

Feature 101

Video Game Studies 101

Lars Schmeink

I AM A GAMER. This is not part of a twelve-step program confession but a generational fact. And I am not alone. My generation, that has been so snidely labeled Generation X, is the first to have grown-up into gaming culture, completely enveloped by it. I was not part of the college crowd when *Spacewar!* and its variants[1] were first installed at universities; I was too young for that. I was a small kid when my older brother brought home the very first Atari *Pong* gaming console,[2] and those two white lines reflecting a white dot going back and forth on the TV screen enraptured me completely. Because of this, I have grown up with games from early childhood on and I have become a gamer. There is no time in my life that I have not been playing video games. So, video game studies as a field of academic inquiry comes naturally to me. I know the immense capacity for stories, the challenges (physical, psychological, and emotional) of gameplay, the social implications of gaming, and of course I know all the wonderful moments when video games award you for accomplishing that task, finishing that quest, finding that awesome item or just getting rid of that pesky enemy. But many of you might not.

So I will start with a couple of facts that might surprise you. US consumers have made video games the biggest player in the entertainment industry: entertainment software accounted for $15.9 billion in sales in 2010 while the music industry claimed $6.8 billion and the motion picture industry claimed $10.6 billion.[3] Video games can be found in 72% of American households—and it is not just the teenage boys that play them. Instead, the average gamer is by now 37 years old and 42% of all gamers are female. And these figures are not just a reflection of a generation that has grown up with games either, for 29% of Americans over 50 play games on a regular basis as well.[4] Video gaming is becoming ubiquitous in Western cultures and our students have probably been steeped in gaming for all their lives. As scholars of culture, studying games and their impact on society might thus be the logical and necessary next step for us on the road to understanding the 21st century. In this essay I would like to provide a short overview of the road so far.

History

As with many a field of academic study, it is hard to pinpoint a historic origin for video game studies. There are of course precursors to the field, as video game studies can be understood and analyzed within the more general frame of game studies, which Frans Mäyrä points out is simply, "a multidisciplinary field of study and learning with ga*mes and related phenomena as its subject matter*" (6, italics in original). As such, texts from

disciplines such as philosophy, ethnography, cultural history, military training and simulation, education and sociology might address aspects of game studies before such a field can be discerned. The first key text to propose that human development–and therefore much of culture–is based in "play," thus providing the first important text of game studies, is Johan Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* (1938). Another major contribution to the field was then published in 1958 by French sociologist Roger Caillois, who differentiated play into two types of activity: a more structured 'game' according to explicit rules ("ludus") and a free, associative form of 'play" ("paidea"; cf. Frasca). Game studies have thus contributed strongly to the sociological and cultural historical aspects of video game studies.

The earliest writings on video games, though, have focused on technical aspects, discussing programming, design and engineering of games for electronic devices (cf. Wolf and Perron, "Introduction" 3ff.) while debating the scope of the field (i.e., the in- or exclusivity of terms such as 'electronic games,' 'video games' and 'computer games'). Starting from as early as 1970 and in parallel with the development of the games themselves, a critical reflection on gaming's economical aspects, as well as the conception of guide books (for gamers, programmers, etc.), started-both supported by a growing gaming industry and fan base. However, since this kind of (academic) writing on video games is not central to our purposes (even though it still holds a major proportion of the field today), I will neglect it for the rest of this article. Similarly, I will not concentrate on aspects of the sociology or psychology of gaming, which started to become an interest of the field from the 1980s onward and are today considered vital parts of video game studies–even accounting for the most prominent and publicly scandalous aspect of video games: the killer game and its societal consequences.

For the purpose of science fiction studies, the most relevant aspects of gaming rather lie in their function as cultural texts, as stories presented in a specific medium and with meaning structures that can be decoded via the tools of text and media studies. Historically speaking, the Humanities interest in video games as artifacts has been present only for twenty years. Many of these studies approach video games via theories borrowed from other disciplines such as theatre and performance (cf. Laurel), film (as proposed by the Le Diberder brothers, cf. Wolf and Perron, "Introduction" 8) and textual narratology (cf. Ryan), all of which are valid in certain respects but lacking in others. It seems obvious that video games share the performance aspect of drama in that parts of them need to be acted out by the player. Similar to film, the video game relies heavily on visuals and has lots of scripted storytelling, so much so as to even prompt the medial crossbreed of the interactive film (such as Sony Entertainment's *Heavy Rain*). Lastly, narratological approaches have been useful to identify concepts such as focalization, narrator position and diegetic levels within the video game.

Concepts

One of the key arguments against a purely textual approach (no matter which text form is chosen, i.e. film, prose, drama) is that it neglects the specific medium of the game and does not incorporate the involvement of the player in constructing textual meaning. In 1997, Espen Aarseth in his seminal study *Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature*, therefore proposed to conceptualize video games as a non-linear textual form that needs non-trivial work (not just turning the page) from the user/reader in order to physically construct the "semiotic sequence" (1) of the text. As Aarseth puts it, the game is not metaphorically but logically best represented as a labyrinth of forking paths, which needs to be navigated by the user via non-trivial work:

> This may be hard to understand for the traditional literary critic who cannot perceive the difference between metaphorical structure and logical structure, but it is essential. The cybertext reader *is* a player, a gambler; the cybertext *is* a game-world or world-game; it *is* possible to explore, get lost, and discover secret paths in these texts, not metaphorically, but through the topological structures of the textual machinery. (4, emphasis in original)

Aarseth thus stresses the importance of a conceptual separation of a game and a narrative, arguing for a video game studies approach that recognizes similarities as well as differences. Similarly, Gonzalo Frasca has pointed out the problem that games have been approached and structurally analyzed mainly from a narratological perspective (be it via film or text), ignoring the option to analyze them as games. In an attempt to provide a unified terminology to study games, he argued for the necessity to establish of a "ludology," a discipline that studies games irrespective of their medium, just as narratology studies narrative irrespective of its medium (cf. "Ludology," n.pag.), and which will be able to provide a formal framework for all gaming aspects of video games, complementing the narratological as-

pects.

Narratological studies provide a system of formal categories for describing games, for example according to their point of view (referring to how the player perceives himself as the actor of the game) and point of action (referring to how the game interface allows for manipulation of the game world; cf. Neitzel) or according to the games' appropriation of scripted and unscripted events to advance the narration (cf. Thon). Frasca's ludological approach on the other hand goes beyond the formal description of games as a narrated representation of events, instead focusing on the concept of simulation: video games do not narrate (i.e. represent) the events but rather simulate (i.e. model the behavior of) them ("Simulation versus Narrative" 222f.). To simulate, Frasca says, "is to model a (source) system through a different system which maintains (for somebody) some of the behaviors of the original system" (ibid. 223). For video games, this means that the game system models some aspects of the behavior of another system (such as driving a car, playing football or shooting a gun) and the player can actively modify this system to experience a different outcome. What is key to this concept is that for the player the game is not just the output we see on the screen but the experience of choice, interaction and movement in the simulated system. This is not so for those who are not actively playing: "for an external observer, the outcome of simulation is a narration" (Frasca, "Simulation 101" 2) and a game might look and feel like a film–thus prompting the conflation of both media. Where in a film the viewer is damned to live through whatever action happens on screen, in a game the player can actively decide to do otherwise, at least to a degree that the rules of the simulation allow. These rules, governed by the programming that a "simauthor" (Frasca, "Simulation versus Narration," 227) provides the game with, determine the simulated system's behavior and can be analyzed according to their ideological standpoint. The player's decisions, their range, and also their outcome are determined by the system's behavior, and thus by the simauthor's ideological stance that allows for certain behaviors or determines the probability of a desired outcome. This approach then can, for example, lead to interesting cross-analysis with political or psychoanalytical readings of video games (a Marxist approach to *SimCity*; a feminist reading of *Tomb Raider*; the Freudian sublime in *Doom*, etc.).

But since games are both ludus and narration, the latter is considered a relevant factor in their analy-sis. The key concept of medium specificity in a video game narration then is its difference to other media. Namely, the question is how deeply the player/viewer feels involved in the events that are narrated/simulated. Marie-Laure Ryan proposes two categories that define this relation in any text and that are central to conceptualizing video games: immersion and interactivity. For Ryan, "immersion is the experience through which a fictional world acquires the presence of an autonomous, language-independent reality populated with live human beings" (14). In effect, then, the more immersive a text is, the more we feel to be part of its world, the more we identify with our character (or avatar, as the game terminology goes) and the more we 'forget' that we are reading a book, watching a movie or playing a game. Interactivity on the other hand refers to the amount of participation in and the level of awareness of the work needed "in the production of meaning" (16). In reading a novel this refers to the intellectual work of world-construction, but in a game it can be understood as performance, "actually participating in the physical production of the text" (17) for example by guiding the avatar with the mouse, clicking buttons or even swinging the remote (as with the Wii controller interface).

Both concepts are not exclusive to video game worlds but can be found in literary texts as well. The problem here arises that literary texts can provide only either immersion or interactivity but not both at the same time, as interactivity (or self-reflexivity in the case of literary texts, i.e. when the text reminds us that we are actively reading and constructing meaning from language-signs) disrupts the immersion by reminding us of our "external perspective on the worlds of the textual universe" (20). In virtual realities such as video games, on the other hand, "we act within a world and experience it from the inside," through the "projection of a virtual body" (20f.) and are thus able to reconcile immersion and interactivity by acting as if we were the avatar. The only thing that stands in the way of complete immersive interactivity is the interface that still requires us to click a button instead of actually moving, but game interface development is progressing in this regard so that at some point fully realized virtual worlds might seem possible. As William Gibson has shown us so phenomenally well when he described cyberspace in *Neuromancer* (1984): science fiction can influence the mundane world; it just takes time.

Science Fiction Gaming

And there we are, finally, at the question of how video

games and science fiction come together. There is the obvious question of how games as a technology, as a medium and a social arena, participate in 'classic' science fiction media. Many examples can be found since the inception of video games in the 1970s. In particular, visual science fictions have tried to explore virtual gaming worlds, either as a reflection of and training ground for real life challenges (*WarGames* [1983], *Starfight* [1984], *Stargate Universe* [2009-]), as an alternative or parallel world to be explored (*Tron* [1981], T*ron: Legacy* [2010], *Caprica* [2010]) or as an allegory for political or personal conflicts (*Avalon* [2001], *eXistenZ* [1999], *Gamer* [2009]). Literary depictions of gaming have been fewer but exist in cyberpunk (via some depictions of virtual realities) as well as contemporary (science fiction) literature such as Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003) or Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother* (2008) and *For the Win* (2010). Add to that the growing amount of video game adaptations that rework gaming experiences into cinematic narratives–sometimes with more success (*Final Fantasy – The Spirit Within* [2001], *Resident Evil* [2002]) sometimes with less success (*Wing Commander* [1999], *Doom* [2005])–and you have a fairly interesting body of texts in 'classic' media that deal with gaming and science fiction. All of that can be dealt with outside video game studies and with classic literary or media studies approaches.[5]

If you remember the name of the first video game from the beginning of this article, though, it should become clear that video games themselves have always been inspired by science fiction and provide a rich field for SF Media Studies. Already with *Spacewar!*, we can see the thematic orientation that has provided the game with its tropes: two spaceships fight each other while constantly trying to escape the gravitation of a star in the middle of the screen. From there on out, science fiction and video games were a match made in virtual heaven and many a game classic cannot be fully grasped without science fiction in mind: *Space Invaders* (1978)–inspired by H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898)–as well as the science-fiction themed *Asteroids* (1979), future-war themed *Missile Command* (1980) and *Defender* (1980), and of course the video game adaptation of the film *Tron* (1982). For the purposes of a "101," though, I would like to concentrate on more contemporary examples and provide an outlook as to where science fiction studies and video game studies intersect most prominently. I will thus present some recent games and shortly exemplify their contribution to their respective genres[6] as well as their science fictional

aspects.

Mass Effect (BioWare, Electronic Arts, CDN/US 2007) is the first installment of an action game series (supposed to be a trilogy by 2012) that can be understood within the genre of space opera. Set in 2183 on a space ship and several planets throughout the 'Citadel'-ruled galaxy, the scope of the story is epic: the hero, Commander Shepard, is training to become special-ops (a 'Spectre'), and is sent out to retrieve an item called the 'Artifact' when the planet is overrun by the 'Geth.' Led by the rogue 'Spectre' Saren, the 'Geth' capture the 'Artifact' and try to use it in order to awaken a dark and evil race of machine life forms called 'The Reapers.' Shepard has thus to reveal the betrayal of Saren, stop the awakening of the Reapers, gather allies in the coming war and in the process uncover the machinations of intergalactic politics in order to save the galaxy. The game prominently features a space opera, which as described by Brian Stableford in the *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction* is "[a] colourful action-adventure stor[y] of interplanetary or interstellar conflict," with prominent themes of space travel and intergalactic politics, a "calculatedly romantic element" for the plot (Shepard can 'flirt' with basically any of his/her crew mates), and an epic story arc on a content level. Furthermore, the game mechanics reflect aspects of the space opera as well in that the game combines action-adventure with roleplaying game (RPG) elements, allowing for character development and decision points. The game is highly immersive in the sense that RPGs allow individual choices on character creation (down to sex, phenotype, skill set and abilities) and later development during the game. This enables players to stronger identify with Shepard, who will be the protagonist of the whole series, therefore binding affective response to him/her. At the same time singling out an individual as a larger than life hero is another typical element of the space opera. In addition, the game also stresses both immersion and interactivity by leaving crucial plot decisions up to the player, thus allowing for several different paths that the story could take. The end of the first part of the trilogy is for example determined by giving players the choice whether to back a certain political system or to overthrow it, resulting in a completely different starting position for the second part of the trilogy. This adds to the epic, political scope of the story and the character's (i.e. the player's) individual position in the events, again emphasizing space opera genre conventions, a highly developed world-building of the game, and an identification with the character–as his/her path in the game is

decided mainly by the player, not by a script.

Similarly, *BioShock* (2k Boston, 2k Games, US 2007)[7] most effectively uses player agency and moral decision points to emphasize genre aspects of two other science fiction genres: those of utopia and the alternate history. The first-person shooter takes places in an alternate 1960, when the plane of protagonist Jack crashes on a small island in the middle of the Atlantic and he finds the entrance to the underwater city Rapture, an Objectivist utopia. Rapture was built by Objectivists[8] in this alternate history in order to counter the Cold War exploitation of science and business for ideological purposes. But at the time of Jack's discovery, Rapture's utopian ideal had already turned into a dystopian nightmare due to internal power struggles finally leading to civil war. Jack finds himself trapped under the sea with hordes of genetically altered 'Splicers,' a post-human breed reminiscent of zombies and mutants, who try to kill him continuously, thus prompting the shooter aspect of the game. During his heroic journey to re-ascend he finds helpers, has to defeat adversaries, is tested over and over again, and finally faces the antagonist, all in a very monomythical quest, before being able to return to his own world above the sea. During his journey he uncovers, via audio cues on tape and other clues throughout Rapture, the history of the city's origin, rise to utopian ideal, and subsequent fall to dystopian ruin.

Similar to utopian literature, both in its eutopian and dystopian form, *BioShock* presents the player with a world that describes "a non-existent society described in considerable detail," locating it recognizably "in time and space" (9), as Lyman Tower Sargent describes literary utopias. As in the utopian tradition, Jack the outsider needs an explanation in order to grasp Rapture's "dream of a better life" (Sargent 10), which is given to him via his guide Atlas, as well as through information gleaned from (audio) documents and from commentaries by other citizens of Rapture. But overlaying this utopian ideal of the founding of Rapture in the past also lies the game's present, in which it turns out that Jack is not a utopian outsider but an integral part of its downfall, and can either participate in rectifying the dystopian situation or promoting it into the rest of the world. Following the principle of the alternate history, the game in its simultaneous set-up of exploring both utopian past and dystopian present opens up speculation on "the nature of time and linearity […] and the role of individuals in the history-making process" (Hellekson 254) that goes beyond literary possibilities.

More so than in literary or cinematic works, the game perspective of the first-person shooter (that of no visible avatar but the weapon 'the player' carries) allows for the "implied observer of narrative event–an 'absent one'" of film to become a "'present one,' standing in for the player" (Rehak 121) embodying and representing the authorial agency of the player herself. The game therefore allows the player to experience alternate history, the decisions that partake in the "history-making process," from the perspective of the active agent, fully immersing via the first-person perspective that cinema does not allow. *BioShock* enables players to participate in the utopian/dystopian world, at the same time denying their "own material existence" and feeling the seductive generation of "new perspectives," of the forked paths of history that may lead to either solution. They become "effectively a cyborg consciousness" (Rehak 113) identifying with the game's character, resulting in an ultimate mix of immersion and interactivity: you, as player, decide the outcome of our future, not the author of the utopian/dystopian work you read/watch (cf. Schmeink).

Dead Space (Visceral Games, Electronic Arts, US 2008)[9] is a third-person action game that falls into the video game category called survival horror, referring to games in which "the player leads an individual character through an uncanny narrative and hostile environment where the odds are weighed decidedly against the avatar" (Hand 117) and whose fantastic aspects are usually more closely associated with horror than with science fiction. But as Richard J. Hand argues:

> [S]urvival horror can take place as easily in a futuristic setting as in a fictional past. It may be the setting, the mood or the violence in a game that make it horror. It may be the structuring of narrative, characterization, or the experience of gameplay that make it survival horror. (119)

The game thus straddles both genres, enhancing the horror elements with a science fiction backdrop, which enables it to reimagine horror categories such as the sublime or the abject in order to provoke even stronger emotions of shock or anxiety in the player.

Dead Space is set in the year 2508 onboard the gigantic mining ship 'USG Ishimura,' a vessel used to harvest resources by ripping apart whole planets and mining the broken pieces for precious materials. On one such mining trip, the Ishimura stops broadcasting and protagonist Isaac Clarke (yes, he is named after famous sf writers), an engineer, is sent to investigate the ship and repair it, if necessary. Unfortunately his own ship

crashes and his crew soon gets slaughtered, leaving the player stranded on the Ishimura and desperately looking for an escape and trying to survive. The player soon discovers what led to the demise of the crew onboard: an alien virus has first killed and then reanimated the deceased crew by mutating them into 'Necromorphs.' In the guise of Clarke, only equipped with engineering tools, the player now has to survive by finding ammunition and better weapons, repairing the ship and mostly by trying to evade confrontations with the Necromorphs as fights with them are threateningly challenging at best, quick and deadly at worst.

Horror is generally defined by the affect it creates in its 'reader,' thus any horror game's main goal is to transport emotions of fear, repulsion and despair. Noel Carroll has famously shown in his book *The Philosophy of Horror* that in what he terms "art horror" (the horror elicited by artworks, not by real events) these emotions are experienced paradoxically, for at the same time the artwork produces pleasure in the recipient. In video games, Aki Järvinen argues, the player is emotionally rewarded with different 'pleasures' derived from several core emotions, all of which the game usually enhances by specific aesthetic embodiments (cf. 96ff.). In *Dead Space*, then, the sublime aesthetics of the gigantic ship ripping apart a planet, the vastness and inescapability of space surrounding the ship, the dwarfing size of the rooms, the constant darkness that leaves the player unable to fully sense his environment are embodiments of the sublime in the game that evoke feelings of despair, uncertainty and fear (cf. 103). In addition, the game's grotesque Necromorph bodies (which within the rules of the gameplay the player needs to dismember in order to overcome), the constant threat to the avatar (and in extension to the player), the shock moments elicited by fast and surprising attacks, and the visual and auditive presentation of repulsive transformations of human bodies (the game is infamous for its violent death scenes and display of viscera), transport the idea of the abject in the game and thus function to facilitate emotions of shock, repulsion and fear. As Järvinen puts it, the aesthetics of the game "set up eliciting conditions for particular emotions" (106), all which provide the player with a "pleasure of the mind" (89) by experiencing them while at the same time, on a meta-level, they are trying to overcome them–a reaction which can be related to Carroll's paradoxical emotion of art horror and which is strongly linked to game mechanics and aesthetics.

I have given these three examples in detail and depth

to show the possibilities of different theoretical approaches to science fiction in video games. As both the medium and the genre evolve, there will be of course many more topics and many more games open for academic exploration, some of which I would like to briefly mention for the reader's discretion and maybe to spark an interest. This list is of course completely selective and exclusively inspired by personal gaming experience:

• *Space Invaders* (Taito, Midway, J 1979) is a classic arcade game in which the player controls a ground vehicle that needs to shoot down an alien invasion force slowly descending from above.

• *Star Trek: Strategic Operations Simulator* (Sega, J 1982) is the first arcade game that allows *Star Trek*-fans to simulate space battle and fight at the controls of a Starfleet-ship. The famous franchise has produced a large number of games since 1971.

• *Elite* (Acorn, UK 1984) is a simulation of space flight and interstellar trade, built solely in vector graphics, in which the player takes the role of a spacefaring trader.

• *Maniac Mansion* (LucasArts, Softgold, US 1987) is the first of several point&click adventures that combine humor, gothic and science fiction. The player has to rescue a girl from a haunted house, but a mad scientist, alien meteorites, and tentacle monsters also play a large part in the story.

• *Starcraft* (Blizzard, US 1998) is the science fiction variant of Warcraft (the strategy pre-cursor to the online roleplaying game World of Warcraft), a real-time strategy game in which players need to build armies and deploy them across a territory in order to conquer it.

• *Halo* (Bungee, Microsoft, US 2002) is a first-person shooter that combines aspects of space opera and military science fiction and that has evolved into a game universe of several more games.

• *Spore* (Maxis, Electronic Arts, US 2008) is a 'life simulation,' or 'evolution simulation,' that sets out with the creation of a simple alien life form, which the player then has to develop over several evolutionary stages into a vast intergalactic empire.

• *Star Wars: The Old Republic* (BioWare, Electronic Arts, CDN/US 2011) is the first massively multiplayer online roleplaying game (MMORPG) in the Star Wars franchise, which has produced a vast number of video games since 1982.

If you have become interested in the topic, there

are two good introductory texts that might provide an overview: Frans Mäyrä's *An Introduction to Video Games* and Simon Egenfeldt-Nielsen et al.'s *Understanding Video Games*. In order to delve deeper into the possibilities and different aspects of gaming I would wholeheartedly recommend Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernhard Perron's *The Video Games Theory Reader* and its second volume of the same name.

As I hope my examples have shown, video games provide science fiction with a new medium to convey its themes and subject matters. They offer new perspectives, allow for other forms of interaction and immersion and they have a different reader response as well as a unique way to produce meaning. As such, they offer scholars working in cultural studies, science fiction or not, a fruitful field of academic analysis and should be part of the scope we consider when dealing with today's culture.

[1]*Spacewar!* is considered the first video game to be created (in 1962; cf. Wolf and Perron, "Introduction" 2). In 1971 a variant of the game was released as a coin-operated arcade game and placed on Stanford University campus.

[2]*Pong* is the first video game to become a sales hit. Its arcade release of 1972 was in 1975 followed up by a home release of the game via the Sears catalog.

[3]Sources: The Entertainment Software Association (www.theesa.com), The Motion Picture Association of America (www.mpaa.org) and the Recording Industry Association of America (www.riaa.com). The ESA figures refer to all software matters, a figure that includes both software and hardware sales would come to $25.1 billion.

[4]Source: The Entertainment Software Association (www.theesa.com/facts).

[5]The analysis of representing the specific video game medium and or the game mechanics in film or prose narrative could be an interesting exception to that claim.

[6]It is important to note that video game studies have so far not produced a coherent terminology of genre and that critical studies normally adhere to genre labels as they are used by video game journalists, such as "shooter," "jump'n'run," "beat'em'up," "adventure," "simulation" or "roleplaying game." These categories are therefore not established in a me-dium specific genre discourse and are presented here for lack of a better terminology.

[7]A sequel, *BioShock 2* (2k Marin, 2k Games, US/AUS 2010), takes place after the events of the first game in Rapture, while a third instalment, *BioShock: Infinite* (Irrational Games, 2k Games, US 2012), is due to be released in 2012 and will take a different alternate history point of divergence, setting the game in 1912 aboard an airborne city. In addition to this, an alternate reality website, several downloadable content packages and a novel have been tied to the game universe.

[8]The game overtly acknowledges its debt to Ayn Rand's works, both philosophical as well as literary. There are strong intertextual references in the game to A*tlas Shrugged* (1957) as well as *The Fountainhead* (1943), to her philosophical thinking, headed under the term Objectivism, and even to the author Ayn Rand herself.

[9]The sequel *Dead Space 2* (Visceral Games, Electronic Arts, US 2011) is set three years after the events of Dead Space, while a prequel called *Dead Space: Extraction* (Visceral Games, Electronic Arts, US 2009) describes the events prior to the original game. The game universe has also spawned two animated films, downloadable content as well as comic books and an alternate reality website.

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The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction

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Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint. *The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 2011. Paper, xii + 252 pages, $29.95, ISBN 978-0-415-43571-0.

ONE SIGN THAT SF STUDIES is alive and thriving is the proliferation of quality histories that have been written in the past several years. With *The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction*, Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint provide another solid addition to the field that complements such recent cultural histories of the genre as Roger Luckhurst's *Science Fiction* (2005) and John Rieder's *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008). Informed by recent developments in genre theory and science studies, Bould and Vint map out a history of SF that charts the debates about the genre at different moments in history. Rather than giving a taxonomic definition of science fiction that they then use to survey the field, Bould and Vint examine how SF definitions have evolved as authors, publishers, fans, and scholars have included and excluded specific texts in their attempts to define their own visions of the genre. Drawing from the work of science studies (and more specifically the work of Bruno Latour), Bould and Vint consider how people involved in ongoing debates about the genre draw upon a multitude of social and cultural networks in order to give legitimacy to their definitions and to move SF in the directions they desire (4-5). Therefore, one major goal of their own history of the genre is to "foreground the multiplicity of SF and its embeddedness in the wider social world" (5).

Bould and Vint self-consciously limit the scope of their history to "SF as literature," which is consistent with the book series of which it is a part (*The Routledge Concise History of Literature* series). However, they do make frequent references to other media to show the contexts and limitations of literary histories of SF (including their own). Because of their areas of expertise, Bould and Vint also limit their history to "Anglophone SF and authors primarily from the US and the UK," though they readily acknowledge the importance of other strong SF traditions and the limitations of their

"*partial* history of SF" (x-xi). In their discussion of previous histories of the genre, Bould and Vint divide them into two general types. The first type dates the beginnings of SF to the emergence of SF pulps in the U.S. during the 1920s. Bould and Vint examine Hugo Gernsback's famous editorial in the first issue of *Amazing Stories*—and the stories he selected to republish from Verne, Wells, and Poe—to highlight some possible commonalities and distinctions between the SF definitions that take the pulps as their starting point. The second type of SF history "starts by constructing a theoretical description of SF" and then uses the definition to rewrite SF history. This is a compelling way for Bould and Vint to view the landscape of the field: it allows them to show how contested SF has been for the past eighty-five years, while at the same time giving them room to examine the terrain of what has been included and excluded from the genre at different points. In the second chapter, for example, Bould and Vint examine how definitions of SF in the 1920s—such as the famous definition given by Gernsback in the first issue of *Amazing Stories*—included and excluded types of stories that have been associated with the genre. Looking at everything from future war and evolutionary fiction to weird SF and space fantasy, the authors show how it was "only as the name and idea of the genre were introduced that actants began, retrospectively and inconsistently, to understand them as belonging, at least potentially, to SF" (35). By exploring what these types of stories were like, Bould and Vint effectively map the terrain that was being contested to give a broader understanding of SF during the period. They extend this in the third chapter to the 1930s and the development of different understandings of SF coming from comic strips, radio programs, films, pulp SF, and fandom. As SF became more of a "recognizable generic 'brand,'" the efforts of people such as Gernsback and Philip Nowlan fueled divergent understandings of the genre that were profitable (41). Even fandom began to be courted as a way to market the genre and enroll readers in the ongoing debates about SF.

With the explosion of SF in the 1940s and 1950s, Bould and Vint's task gets more difficult. They point out how the "Golden Age" myth surrounding John W. Campbell's influence was limited, and how his magazine "*Astounding* was regularly outsold by several other pulps" (74). With the World's Fairs and the realization of the atomic bomb, science fiction was seemingly becoming institutionalized and developed into science fact at an alarming pace. Bould and Vint discuss how the hard SF tradition associated with Campbell's editorial guidance of *Astounding* led to larger universes stretched across many stories, which subsequently expanded their influence when reprinted as books. The extended influence of Campbell became a central part of later histories of the genre. However, SF writing in the 1950s was moving out of the SF pulps (despite the growth in SF magazine titles) and into more mainstream magazines such as *Collier's* and *The New Yorker*. The growth of SF in comics, radio, television, and film made it "increasingly difficult to argue that a specific editor, magazine or group of writers constituted the core of the genre" (84). The 1950s also saw the increased influence of women writers like Judith Merril and a new exploration of gender and the domestic sphere in SF, as well as the much-documented rise in nuclear apocalypse and cybernetic fictions. Bould and Vint tackle all of this, as well as the impact of Dianetics on the dwindling credibility of Campbell, how the genre was responding to Cold War paranoia, and how authors addressed the growing unrest over race relations in the U.S.

Bould and Vint chart the divisions of the 1960s and 1970s in a way that shows the divisions still existent in the genre, especially in regards to scholarship and history. Some strands of SF during this period became increasingly experimental formally and engaged with movements for social justice that were focused on issues such as race, gender, and sexuality. Bould and Vint demonstrate how some saw this as a welcome evolution in the genre while others condemned it as the end of SF. The divisions in the genre became more pronounced: hard SF became harder while second wave feminists such as Joanna Russ and the *Dangerous Visions* of Harlan Ellison and New Wave SF cast serious doubts upon hard SF's optimism for the future. Counterculture had a marked influence on SF film of the period, and even old-school giants like Heinlein began to embrace it in works such as *Stranger in a Strange Land*. While SF was becoming more marketable in a number of media (including and especially literature), this period saw the rise of SF scholarship in universities, the dawning of the Star Trek universe on television, and the growth of heroic fantasy. Bould and Vint conclude that, in defining SF, "there has been uneven enrolment of texts from this period concerned with race, gender and environmentalism" (144). For their part, Bould and Vint do an admirable job of addressing the complexity of the 1960s and 1970s in a way that is expansive in its view of the genre instead of exclusive.

In writing up to the present, Bould and Vint cover the rise of cyberpunk, the influence of postmodernism, the resurgence of apocalyptic SF, and the role of SF in the development of the political new right (among other things that will be familiar to most readers of the *SFRA Review*). The layout and the price of *The Routledge Concise History of Science Fiction* make it appropriate for both undergraduate and graduate classes on SF: the clear introductions, bulleted conclusions, and gray-boxed chapter highlights make it readable to college students at all levels. I had my library buy a copy for my American SF class and put it on reserve. My students reported that it was very useful, as it provided them with a concise starting point for their research papers. For scholars, it will challenge many conceptions of the history of SF in a way that should spark some productive conversations. With necessarily partial histories of SF, everyone will find something with which to disagree. However, Bould and Vint take a self-conscious approach to their history that should keep this book on the shelves for a long while to come. ■

Chained to the Alien: The Best of ASFR (Second Series) and *Skiffy and Mimesis: More Best of ASFR, Australian SF Review (Second Series)*

Chris Pak

Damien Broderick, ed. *Chained to the Alien: The Best of ASFR (Second Series)*, Maryland, US: Borgo Press, 2009. e-book, 227 pages, $14.99, ISBN 978-1-4344-5758-5.

—. *Skiffy and Mimesis: More Best of ASFR, Australian SF Review (Second Series)*, Maryland, US: Borgo Press, 2010. e-book, 272 pages, $15.99, ISBN 978-1-4344-5787-5.

DAMIEN BRODERICK sets out to present a sample of the best of the second series of the *Australian Science Fiction Review* (1986-1991). Broderick reconstructs for the contemporary reader a sense of the *ASFR II*'s style, showcasing the variety of concerns that the now defunct but internationally acclaimed fanzine turned journal hosted over its five-year lifespan. Taken as a whole, the sample that these two volumes offer is dominated by the voices of the editors (Jenny Blackford, Russell Blackford, John Foyster, Yvonne Rousseau and Jane Webb), with Russell Blackford, Foyster and Rousseau's articles taking up the lion's share of the selection. Rigorously argued reviews and essays sit alongside looser, more speculative observations focusing on works by Australian authors George Turner and Wynne Whitford, along with American authors Samuel R. Delany, Ursula K. Le Guin, Kim Stanley Robinson, Gene Wolfe, Philip K. Dick and Frank Herbert, among others. Contributions from authors Gregory Benford, Lucius Shepard and Turner are at the centre of the lively and sometimes heated exchanges by letter featured in the second volume, *Skiffy and Mimesis*. Ranging from a careful critical attentiveness to—and here Broderick claims this as *ASFR II*'s hallmark feature which distinguishes it from the first series of the *ASFR* (1966-1969)—an "irreverent" and "sometimes scathing" tone that nevertheless is "genuinely fervent as well about writing that appealed to its well-educated editors" (*Chained* 14), these two collections offer an insight into a recognizably distinct publication that shaped Australian SF criticism during the late eighties.

Although many of the theoretical and thematic concerns of *ASFR II* are distributed throughout *Chained to the Alien* and *Skiffy and Mimesis*, the selection of articles making up the former is weighted toward an exploration of gender, racial and socio-economic otherness in SF, but also toward the otherness that the SF reading experience presents to the reader. Michael J. Tolley's review "Chained to the Alien: Change and Delany," from which the first volume takes its name, examines reversals of difference and familiarity in Delany's *Stars in My Pocket Like Grains of Sand*. Tolley suggests that "One gut reaction of the normal WASP SF reader to this novel is that he (traditionally he is male) is being got at by Delany, that an attempt is being made to turn him into some kind of an alien, a poofter, a lizard-lover, or even a feminist" (120). It is for this sense of estrangement, "the experience of being bewildered and dazzled by excess of light," that Tolley recommends *Stars in My Pocket*, despite the propensity of the text to, in his view, read like an academic exercise in estrangement effects. Broderick's allusion to this essay in the title of the first volume implies an extension of this principle of "alienation" or change more generally to SF (123).

It is unsurprising, then, that Broderick opens *Chained to the Alien* with two essays on feminist SF, which reflects the popularity of the feminist SF utopias

and the interest in feminism that these works fuelled. Yvonne Rousseau's "SF and the Dirty Little Virgin," which draws its name from a song in Le Guin's *Wild Angels*, considers "facts" and their traditional imposition onto women by men, thus drawing a limited comparison to what she perceives to be the mainstream or literary imposition of facts about SF onto readers of the mode. Rousseau's argument is that "SF has given temporary scope to a female hero by isolating her from a world controlled by men" (22). In "I Know Who I Am, But What's My Brand Name?" Janeen Webb draws on Rosemary Jackson's *Fantasy: A Literature of Subversion* to argue that SF is ideally positioned to challenge patriarchal norms and that, drawing on Jenny Wolmark's "Dispatches From the Frontiers of the Female Mind," such questioning may exist alongside further, unquestioned assumptions regarding gender identity. Taking the newly released (at the time) Women's Press of feminist SF, Webb evaluates the feminist engagement of several of the texts of the series, including Russ's *The Female Man* and Jody Scott's *Passing for Human*. These debates are now familiar, and it is easy to see how these articles respond to an intellectual climate in which feminist critical perspectives became part of the foreground of SF criticism internationally, in which writers used the mode to show how "SF [can be] employed in the service of the dirty little virgin" (*Chained* 23).

Much space has been dedicated to a consideration of Turner's works: a total of three essays and a symposium with seven contributors, including an article by Broderick himself, all of which reflect Turner's importance as a writer of Australian SF. The featured symposium illustrates a mixed reception toward Turner's award winning *The Sea and Summer* (1988). John Baxter is of the opinion that "Turner can't write for cumquats" (*Chained* 71), and he presents examples of Turner's writing style to support this claim. Russell Blackford acknowledges five flaws in *The Sea and Summer*, including problems with narrative viewpoint, oracular style, environmental overkill, episodic structure and narrative inconsequence. However, in a note appended to the article in 2009, Blackford admits to being chastened with regard to his third complaint of environmental overkill in the light of the contemporary environmental crisis. Despite these faults, Blackford suggests that there is a "'moral seriousness'" (73) that lifts Turner's works above the rest. Likewise, Martin Bridgstock points out flaws in Turner's extrapolative worldbuilding but insists that his work is "ambitious, powerful, and on many levels compelling" (84).

Broderick uses his article to consider the mainstream reception of Turner's work, primarily through a review written by John Hanrahan for the Melbourne newspaper *The Age*. Broderick suggests that Hanrahan's approach to the text, his failure to read and interpret the text as SF, is exemplary of the tendency to exclude SF itself as a mode alien to the "mainstream." Praising the didactic merits of Turner's work and going so far as to suggest that "we need him [Turner] to train readers up to the demands of SF so that they can go on to competence in the demands of reality" (87), Broderick raises the issue of the ghettoization of SF while arguing for its purpose as a literature that engages with pressing contemporary issues.

The last four essays anticipate the themes that are foregrounded in *Skiffy and Mimesis*. They reflect Broderick's anxiety that SF is being pushed out of mainstream consideration. Turner argues in his essay "The Real Science Fiction" that the language of SF has been built up among its fandom and is in fact damaging to the mode. For Turner it is what he calls "fringe" SF, "non-commercially oriented science fiction" that is not overly determined by genre conventions that has the best hope of saying something worthwhile (198). This essay works simply by redefining SF as a specific historical commodity and everything else—works, for example, such as *1984*—as "fringe." In this sense what Turner seems to be referring to is "sci-fi," pronounced "skiffy" by SF insiders, which Broderick explains in his introduction to *Skiffy and Mimesis* is "brainless, ill-considered, conspiracy-clotted blockbuster movies or comic books where science is not just indistinguishable from magic but actually *replaced* by magic" (*Skiffy* 12). Wry "skiffy," on the other hand, is "the amused streetwise cousin of both sci-fi and traditional sf" and operates almost as an antidote to overly "sercon" ("serious and constructive") audiences, reminding them that, as Russell Blackford says, "science fiction is *fun*" (12). The pieces in *Skiffy and Mimesis* are organized with the question of mimesis in mind: of SF's problematic relation to the contemporary world. While there is an unhelpful lack of page numbers in the contents page, the implicit structure of *Chained* is here made explicit, with the text divided into four uneven sections with a single piece by Turner concluding the collection.

Like *Chained*, *Skiffy* offers useful reviews and surveys of author works, most notably *The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick* volumes I and II in the section "Philip K. Dick Begins," along with Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Planet on the Table*, Cordwainer Smith's *Norstrilia* and

The Instrumentality of Mankind, Le Guin's *Always Coming Home* and Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood*, all gathered in the section "Countries of the Mind." One of the best reviews is Zoran Bekric's examination of the Watchmen graphic novel, which compares the reading experience of comics versus prose, focusing on stylistic features such as the repetition of imagistic motifs and the text's use of realism. Bekric argues that the realism employed in *Watchmen* is conditioned by a historical difference with our own history, the implications of which are fully appreciated only when chaos theory is brought to bear on the text. Bekric goes on to historicize the real world Hermann Rorschach, the science of airships, and the Nixon administration in order to throw into relief the differences between realities and to suggest the extrapolative rigor that might have led to this alternative history. Bekric argues that realism is itself a literary mode and "a particularly insidious ideology because the name it uses implies that its worldview is realistic—that is, true to the nature of the world as it is" (103). Realism in Bekric's sense is a stylistic mode in which questions of mimesis are as problematic as verisimilitude, plausibility and realism are in SF. Ultimately, Bekric argues that *Watchmen*'s use of realism is "a celebration of fascism," as it utilizes realism to stack the deck, to present a moral dilemma that is in itself suspect (107).

The two most interesting sections in this volume are "The Ambiguities of Utopia" and "Skiffy and Mimesis," both of which include a series of responses to what has proven to be highly controversial essays on a given theme. "The Ambiguities of Utopia" opens with Rousseau's review of "Three Utopias": Austin Tappan Wright's *Islandia* and two feminist utopias by Catherine Helen Spence, *Handfasted* and *A Week in the Future*. Gregory Benford's well-known piece on Le Guin's *The Dispossessed*, "Reactionary Utopias," is reprinted along with the critical responses that it drew from Foyster, Rousseau and Talbot. Foyster raises the question of "why science fiction appears to be inherently politically conservative" and suggests that, "Benford's questions, sensibly reformulated, could help us to understand why science fiction occupies a domination-conserving political niche rather than one more liberating for humanity" (159). Rousseau, however, points out that Benford's critique reduces itself to an attack on feminist utopias (161) and that Benford's hostility to what Rousseau parodies as "Unimaginative UnAmerican Feminists" and his willingness to establish a critical binary between progressive American utopias and reactionary European utopias (165) reveals Benford's projection of his own hostile and reactionary view toward *The Dispossessed*. Talbot chooses to develop his point that "Benford's resistance to competent reading is very dogged" (176) by examining Benford's inaccuracies regarding the text and how this compromises his argument.

The section "Skiffy and Mimesis" presents the more sustained and passionate debate of the two collections of letters. This debate centers around two articles, Foyster's "War and Science Fiction: Two Counter-Examples," reprinted in *Chained to the Alien*, and his essay "The Role of the Science Fiction Reader: Cyberpunk and the Kids in Costume," in which he argues that "there is decreasing room for science fiction which is not derived from the fantasies of teenagers, especially and generally male teenagers" (201). Turner uses his dimly remembered recollection of Foyster's comments on Lucius Shepard's *Life During Wartime* in the former article to launch his own criticism of Shepard's portrayal of war in "Sci-Fi and Psi-Fi: How Point of View Influences Reviewing" as "a hollow novel, a savage fantasy rather than science fiction" (208). Shepard's response is certainly exasperated and (justifiably) confrontational: "who the fuck […] cares what is legitimate science fiction and what is not?" (212). In the article that gives this collection its name, "Skiffy and Mimesis; Or, Critics in Costume," Russell Blackford provides an excellent analysis of both Turner and Foyster's arguments, pointing out that "both articles attempt to deal with the relationship between social-individual reality and literary production" (227). This last exchange drew responses from other contributors including Peter Nicholls and Douglas Barbour, and is exemplary of the fierce debate surrounding notions of genre in the late 1980s – early 1990s.

There are certainly some insightful reviews in these volumes, yet acute critical pieces that retain their urgency and topical status is not the primary strength of these collections. Broderick informs the reader in the introduction to *Chained to the Alien* that some of these articles have been "somewhat updated, although never drastically," and that "by and large these are views reflecting the climate of writing and opinion, as well as the politics, of the day—the more valuable precisely for that" (*Chained* 15). As the final exchange of letters in *Skiffy* illustrates, these two volumes work well as documents of the Australian critical climate and the Australian SF community's response to American SF. These two volumes provide a resource for those wish-

ing to study the Australian contribution to SF scholarship as well as the nature and value invested in various American and Australian authors and works by the Australian critical community at the time. The debates in *Skiffy and Mimesis* are also especially entertaining to read, although as Nicholls notes with regard to the debate over skiffy and mimesis, it is certainly one sided and weighted toward Shepard and Blackford's insights. Overall, *Chained to the Alien* and *Skiffy and Mimesis* offer a wide-ranging sample from a journal that, from the evidence presented by these two volumes, certainly deserves its reputation as a fiercely passionate yet critically minded publication. ∎

Science Fiction and the Prediction of the Future: Essays on Foresight and Fallacy

Moira O'Keeffe

Gary Westfahl, Wong Kin Yuen and Amy Kit-sze Chan, eds. *Science Fiction and the Prediction of the Future: Essays on Foresight and Fallacy*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011. Paper, 271 pages, $35.00, ISBN 978-0-7864-5841-7.

WHEN CRITICS NOTE that science fiction has failed to predict accurately some aspect of the present world, science fiction writers often retort that they are in the business of storytelling, not prognostication. At the same time, this notion that science fiction might provide a window into the future has always been imbedded in the genre. As Gary Westfahl points out in the introduction to the volume under consideration, Hugo Gernsback and John W. Campbell, Jr. both saw science fiction as a site of prediction. Gernsback emphasized how creative science fiction writers could offer new ideas for scientists and engineers to pursue. Campbell argued that science fiction's value as a tool of prediction resulted from thoughtful extrapolation about technological developments and their impact on society. Regardless of the goals of individual authors, science fiction is culturally positioned to be central to any discussion about how we envision the future.

Taken as a whole, this collection is an exploration of storytelling, technology and the prediction of the future. Westfahl's introduction clarifies that the inspiration for the book came from a 2003 conference on the theme of "Technoscience, Material Culture and Ev-

eryday Life." While not all of the chapters are based on papers from that conference, the existence of the earlier theme helps to explain the broad approach to the book's topic. Several chapters do tackle directly the question of whether or not science fiction can or should be seen as an attempt to predict the future. Other essays address various connections between technology, genre, and prediction. In addition to the introduction, the book features fifteen chapters divided into two main sections. The first section, "Cosmic Visions," provides a broad overview of the topic, while the second, "The Practice of Prophecy," includes essays about specific works or bodies of work. In addition to a bibliography of sources cited in the text, the editors provide an extensive and valuable bibliography of work about science fiction and prediction of the future.

Along with the aforementioned introduction, Westfahl's lead essay, "Pitfalls of Prophecy: Why Science Fiction So Often Fails to Predict the Future," sets the stage by presenting a framework for analyzing why so many science fictional themes have not come to pass. He concludes by suggesting that predictions emphasizing the stability of culture will likely outperform those that posit radical changes.

Science fiction's role in uncovering the social impact of new technologies is addressed in the second chapter. Richard L. McKinney discusses how the narrative techniques of science fiction can emphasize the ethical implications of technological developments. He argues that the rhetorical strategies employed in the genre provide a way for readers to experience new, science-fictional emotional engagements.

Kirk Hampton and Carol MacKay consider how we can look for "predictions" using analogy. Although science fiction—with one notable exception, mentioned again below—failed to predict the Internet, the authors provide a compelling account of common science-fictional themes that are, in fact, central to our everyday concerns about the Internet and how we use it.

The first section concludes with two chapters on how specific realms of human existence are treated in science fiction, and how these treatments may influence our worldview. Veronica Hollinger writes about the posthuman subject and how we see ourselves in technoculture. McKinney's second essay in this volume deals with the othered places of science fiction, including the "city of tomorrow" and other planets.

The second section of the book opens with Sharalyn Orbaugh's essay about how future Tokyo is portrayed in anime, and how these portrayals connect to the Ital-

ian Futurist movement. Then, in a chapter that can be seen as speaking back to Hampton and MacKay's earlier essay about prediction of the Internet, David L. Ferro and Eric G. Swedin provide a detailed analysis of that one exception, Murray Leinster's short story "A Logic Named Joe." This creative, multi-method piece includes a history of the story, biographical information about Leinster, and reader responses from a current batch of students.

One reoccurring theme in the book's second section is the value of pushing generic boundaries when looking for predictive messages in film. Lynne Lundquist argues that the Beatles' *Help!* provides many accurate predictions as well as overlooked science fiction themes. Later chapters in this section also bring films from other genres (including kung fu, French New Wave and swordplay-based wuxia films) to the table. One specific science fiction film inspired two of the essays included here, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). Gary Westfahl's engaging and thoughtful piece about 2001 deals with the many sequels that have been produced. He analyzes where they diverge from the original story and why they ultimately fail to extend the contemplation of humanity's future in a meaningful way. Rob Latham describes the critical reception of 2001—especially regarding the perceived disconnect between the goals of Arthur C. Clarke and those of Stanley Kubrick—to argue that the film should be analyzed in the context of the debates about science fiction's New Wave.

Brooks Landon also contributes a chapter on the institutional history of science fiction. He writes about the failure of science fiction culture to utilize technological developments that could dramatically change the production, distribution, and reception of fictional works. The relationship between technoscience and material culture is approached from another direction in Amy Kit-sze Chan's essay on how technologies from weaving to computers are gendered.

Gregory Benford provides the closing piece, an engaging hybrid of short story and reflection essay. The combination of forms successfully illustrates how the predictions in science fiction can serve as warnings about how we use technology.

A glance at the contributors' biographical notes will confirm that this book is a highly interdisciplinary project. Thus, many specific topics and perspectives are represented. The book is recommended for readers with a general interest in culture and technology. While science fiction is not the central topic of every chapter, the collection would nevertheless be an excellent

resource for scholars and students of the genre. ∎

The Postnational Fantasy: Essays on Postcolonialism, Cosmopolitics and Science Fiction

Rikk Mulligan

Masood Ashraf Raja, Jason W. Ellis, and Swaralipi Nandi, eds. *The Postnational Fantasy: Essays on Post colonialism, Cosmopolitics and Science Fiction.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2011. Paper, 215 pages, $40.00, ISBN 978-0-7864-6141-7.

AS PART OF MCFARLAND'S SERIES of critical explorations in science fiction and fantasy (SF/F), this collection of twelve essays analyzes works ranging from novels and short stories to films and computer games, through the combined lenses of postcolonialism, nationalism, globalization, and cosmopolitanism and the theories of SF/F criticism. Although their introduction begins with a nod toward the belief that science and technology can be used to equalize class, gender, and economic (and colonial) disparities, Raja and Nandi imply that an actual postnational world is likely to remain a fantasy for some time as the current restructuring of local cultures is an ideal that privileges and remains skewed toward those of the West and global North. Among SF fans and (many) of its critics, this postnational ideal often conjures up the image of a united planet predicated on an American (USian) model, entangled in myths of an American frontier and multicultural identities. Raja and Nandi also stress the importance of these essays as works "mostly by emerging scholars" who will eventually take over from "those wearied seniors who have already been co-opted by the very systems that public intellectuals must contest at all times" (10). Given this context of resistance, these essays provide several productive nodes for questioning the expectations of such well-known examples as the *Star Trek* franchise, and even the implicit leadership of America in the world building behind the current Marvel movies (*Captain America*, *The Avengers*, *Iron Man*, etc.) The core of this collection seeks to use SF as a counter-narrative that will help resist the homogenizing influence of economic and political processes of globalization and to create spaces in which to debate the assumptions of globalizing ideology and fictions.

The essays are organized into three sections; those

of the first section, "Postcolonial Issues in Science Fiction," attempt to create a theoretical context for the collection by pulling together the theories of postnationalism and science fiction. These selections use SF/F to open up discussions of cultural identity, citizenship, and even the basis for a postnational existence grounded in the transformation of a conquered (or created) subaltern identity. Adam Frisch's essay, "Forms of Compromise: The Interaction of Humanity, Technology and Landscape in Ken Macleod's *Night Sessions*" focuses on the joins—points of connection and intersection—between conflicting peoples and ideologies. In his examination of this SF/mystery set in the aftermath of "the Faith Wars," the treatment of emerging Artificial Intelligences reflect many of the class and race issues extant in Britain's past colonial possessions. But rather than focus on class consciousness or hints of a robo-Marxian revolution, Frisch instead looks at these as the basis for the formation of both a postcolonial hybridity and trans-species awareness of interconnection and interdependence. Frisch's brief discussion of the communication between AIs as a technologically mediated Creole is particularly useful to this more expansive definition of identity.

Nation and ethnicity are the focus of the second section, in which Ángel Mateos-Aparicio Martín-Albo's chapter on "The Frontier Myth and Racial Politics" adds to the discussion of new hybrid identities and the influence of the American frontier myth on national identity in postnational futures. Martín-Albo ties Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of the "New Mestiza" as a multinational and ethnic hybrid denizen of the borderlands between nations and cultures to intersecting spaces within globalized worlds and new colonial spaces. By analyzing several depictions of the settlement of Mars, Martín-Albo uses the borderlands and New Mestiza as an improvement on the old homogenizing "melting pot" model to provide for more flexible and dynamic identity than those of the semi-homogenized "melting pot" in a way that acknowledges the past and promotes new possibilities to learn from the past mistakes on the border.

The goal of the third block of essays is to move "Towards a Postnational Discourse" using emerging trends in theory and SF; the essays of Katherine R. Broad and Jason W. Ellis are particularly thought provoking here. Broad examines the *Xenogenesis* trilogy of Octavia Butler to sketch the limits of nationalism and to use a (post-apocalyptic) species' consciousness that remembers past borders and limits, but also shares an awareness of self and our distinctiveness as a species. Here, hybridity threatens to erase both difference and humanity, suggesting the borders of multiculturalism and blending. Jason W. Ellis plays with expressions of cosmopolitan and individual identities in his elaboration of character creation and player choices available through the MMORPG *World of Warcraft*. Ellis mixes Kant with transnational systems of communication and interaction to argue for the ability of virtual interactions to move individual players (and fans) toward a cosmopolitan consciousness and interaction. (He did leave me wondering about the role of trans-faction groups in the game, such as the Earthen Ring, and their effects on cosmopolitan identity.)

Overall these essays are engaging and encompass a variety of concepts that consider not only a multicultural (or semi-homogenized) global postnationalism but also preserve space for Creole and Mestizo identities as dynamic hybridities. That said, some of the essays are more theoretically grounded and part of the postcolonial or cosmopolitics discourse while others restrict themselves to close textual readings. There is some technical unevenness in the volume in terms of notes, citation formats, and references that sometimes obscures the use of the same or similar sources, for instance. Although the introduction makes the political project of the collection itself clear, it might have been improved by better introducing and contextualizing key concepts for those who are not familiar with the related discourses of globalization, postnationalism, and transnationalism, and to some extent for those from outside SF criticism. This collection does lend itself easily to interdisciplinary work and situates well with similar volumes such as Rieder's *Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2008), Hoagland and Sarwal's *Science Fiction, Imperialism and the Third World* (2010), and from outside SF, Singh and Schmidt's collection, *Postcolonial Theory and the United States* (2000). Given the number of shared sources and similarity of arguments, these essays would provide a valuable resources for an upper level literature seminar that uses SF/F to frame issues of globalization and nationalism in an American, Transatlantic, or Regional Studies approach.

Apocalypse in Australian Fiction and Film: A Critical Study

T. S. Miller

Roslyn Weaver. *Apocalypse in Australian Fiction and Film: A Critical Study.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2011. Paper, x + 230 pages, $35.00, ISBN 978-0-7864-6051-9.

EVEN AS AN AMERICAN, I can say that London has always seemed the apocalyptic city par excellence, lately featuring in blockbusters like Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* (2002) and Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006), yet even more prominent in a long literary tradition extending from Wells and Wyndham to Ballard and Miéville. But where better to look than Australia for an entire landscape always-already post-apocalyptic? Roslyn's Weaver's book aims to demonstrate that the Australian love affair with apocalypse runs deeper than the simple visual congruence between wasted desert afterscape and typical outback scrubland. Weaver argues that the apocalyptic tradition in Australian literature and film, while influenced by the continent's hostile landscape and geographic isolation, often reflects the nation's ongoing postcolonial conflicts, and in fact originated in the prehistory of its colonization: "The popularity of apocalypse in Australian fictions has its origins in pre-colonial European speculation about the *terra australis incognita*, the unknown south land" (1).

Landmark works like Nevil Shute's 1957 novel *On the Beach* and the *Mad Max* films figure prominently in this argument, but Weaver also covers far less familiar territory: significantly, this is largely a book about territory and the relationship of territory to the apocalyptic imagination. In its advancement of a coherent, overarching argument, however, the book is not always successful, and its value is considerably diminished by the fact that it derives from no less than six separate previously published essays. Indeed, the book can sometimes read more like a collection of related meditations than a definitive statement about Australian apocalyptic fiction as a class, and unnecessary introductory material bogs down almost every chapter. For example, no reader of an entry in McFarland's "Critical Explorations in Science Fiction and Fantasy" series should need such a long introduction to cyberpunk as that which begins Weaver's chapter 6. Scholars working on Australian apocalypses and dystopias of all kinds will of course still benefit from consulting the book (as they could determine from its title alone), but, while the subject itself is sufficiently compelling to command a much wider readership, this particular attempt to treat it is unnecessary. Nevertheless, simply by virtue of her extensive coverage of the topic, Weaver provides a solid introduction to the study of the subgenre of a subgenre that is the Australian apocalypse: at worst, readers will find in it an excellent reading list and bibliography.

The book is divided into six chapters and a chapter-length introduction, one of the weakest parts of the argument. This introduction discusses Biblical apocalypse and its supposed resonance with the secular apocalypses discussed in the book, but the precise nature of the relationship remains opaque. Weaver likely overemphasizes the role of Biblical apocalypse in the shared "megatext" of apocalyptic fiction, which also draws on other cultural and mythological traditions—such as Ragnarök—and simple a-theistic, extrapolative disaster scenarios. For instance, the place of wilderness in the post-apocalyptic tradition does not *always* evoke the Biblical accounts that Weaver adduces. Accordingly, Weaver's claim that she will focus on texts that "adopt and adapt a secular version of the Biblical apocalypse" suggests a much narrower scope than the book really has (1), since it in fact conflates the utopian and dystopian impulses with the apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic tradition in literature ancient and modern. Another of the major weaknesses of the argument is most pronounced here in the introduction; namely, a habit of quoting scholar after scholar in sentence after sentence. A reader can easily lose track of the author's own voice and argument in this forest of quotations, which reads less like a synthesis of previous scholarship than a turbulent hodgepodge. Finally, some of the points that Weaver makes in the introduction and throughout the book are obvious or even tautological: "The fact that one can understand the term [apocalypse] in many different ways suggests a flexibility of definition" (16).

Chapter one argues one of the book's central theses, reiterated throughout, that early European speculation "established an apocalyptic map of Australia before colonists even experienced the land, and has resulted in a tradition of imagining the nation in apocalyptic terms ever since" (2). In arguing this point, Weaver relies on a perhaps over-literal reading of Baudrillard, in order to examine "the map that preceded, and eventually superseded, the territory of Australia" (24), by which she means the travel writing and literal maps produced by European explorers. In one sense, this argument has appealing explanatory power, but Weaver does not persuasively make a case for a causal link between the early accounts of the continent and the later apocalyptic texts she studies. Nor does the argument sufficiently establish that Australia was unique as an

object of "apocalyptic" colonial speculation; Weaver admits that, "*Like other European colonies*, there was a sense that Australia could be a 'new world,' a space with the apocalyptic potential of being the New Jerusalem" (27; my emphasis). Why, then, do we not argue that the American apocalyptic tradition developed in this same way? Even if one regards the grander claim of this chapter with skepticism, however, these early maps are interesting in themselves, and the book valuably includes images of many of them.

If the first chapter serves as a kind of second introduction, as we move into chapter two, we realize that in fact the majority of the book feels like preamble. A useful discussion of George Turner's novels and Australia's status "on the edge of the world" is delayed in favor of a distracting summary of "Apocalypse After World War II" in all literatures, which obviously cannot do justice to the subject and only distracts from the author's own argument. The third chapter examines the Mad Max films in relation to the outback landscape, and, while Weaver helpfully outlines the complexity of the issues we face in interpreting these arresting films—e.g., that in *Mad Max* and elsewhere, "uncertainties over national identity, 'belonging,' and Indigeneity recur regularly" (107)—she does not always reach clear new conclusions about them. This reluctance to assert characterizes much of the book, and occasionally Weaver will draw as conclusions propositions that most scholars would take for axiomatic; for instance, in the fourth chapter on children's literature, she ends a section on alienation and belonging by concluding that "The preoccupation with these dilemmas in these texts suggest that questions of national identity simmer in even the nation's literature for children" (114).

In spite of a few such problems, the book's final three chapters may have the most potential usefulness for those not interested in the specific subject of Australian apocalypse, since they cover the critically popular subjects of young adult fiction, postcolonial literature, and cyberpunk, respectively. In fact, the chapter on cyberpunk, which interrogates the supposed anti-apocalyptic stance of the genre, is the chapter that seems most like an independent essay detached from the author's main theses. Chapter five, by contrast, is one of the book's strongest, and surely the most essential to the overarching argument about the uniqueness of the Australian apocalyptic tradition. In it, Weaver discusses the recovery in Australian fiction of "apocalypse as a language for the oppressed" (14), arguing that, in many Australian apocalypses, the landscape is post-apocalyptic not because of its inherent wasteness, but because it has been colonized. To this extent, some Indigenous writers work in the apocalyptic tradition precisely to "contest the notion that the Australian landscape is an empty, dead space" (157)—one of the most interesting observations in the book. Unfortunately, the brief conclusion that follows is somewhat uninspiring, containing sentences like "Apocalyptic themes and imagery are recurring and significant features of Australian writing" (186). This is the starting point of an argument, more observation than analytic conclusion. Indeed, the book as a whole strikes me as less analytic than "encyclopedic," which I mean as a term of both praise and qualification: the deep analysis it contains is less impressive than its wide coverage. Again, the book will not be essential reading for every scholar of post-apocalyptic fiction, but anyone can find something interesting inside, or at least some suggestions for further reading. ■

Pardon this Intrusion: Fantastika in the World Storm

Leon Marvell

John Clute. *Pardon this Intrusion: Fantastika in the World Storm*. Essex, UK: Beacon Publications, 2011. Paper, iv + 369 pages, $40.00, ISBN 978-1-870824-60-6.

THE TITLE OF THIS NEW COLLECTION of John Clute's essays derives from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, the Modern Prometheus*. The monster, which has not previously uttered a word, approaches the hovel of a blind man. When the blind man within bids him enter, the monster announces his entry with: "Pardon my intrusion…I am a traveler in want of a little rest." This moment of encounter becomes the escutcheon of this collection of essays. The words of the monster are "the first words of the new century," and the blindness of the old man "tells us literally that he cannot understand the nature of the new order of things looming above him" (14).

Perhaps more than any other collection of Clute's writings, *Pardon This Intrusion* intensifies and consolidates the insights, themes and program (that is, how we should approach the literature of the fantastic, where it came from, and what we should do with it) that he has been elucidating since the turn of this, another unfortunate century. Of course, Clute has been writing about

the literary fantastic since the 1960s, but, as this collection makes abundantly clear, it has been the nexus of self-supporting skeins of real-time events and fantastical constructions in literature since 2001 that has galvanized his thinking concerning the function, purpose and import of *fantastika*, as distinct from the history of fantastical narratives.

The first section of this collection gathers seven essays concerned with the World Storm (Clute's characterization of the last two hundred years or so), including the important work, *Fantastika in the World Storm*, an address first delivered at the Centre for the Future in Prague, in 2007. This piece is important because it defines exactly what Clute means by his use of the term *fantastika*. All nations and all times (seemingly) have had their fantastical stories, but it was not until the end of the 18th century that a particular form of literature arose in Europe: a literature which sought to "consciously subvert the world above," which "apes and mocks decorum, uncovering from within the terrible true understory of the world we in the West have entered" (22). This uncovering is what *fantastika*—whether Horror, Science Fiction or Fantasy—accomplishes for the world that Shelley's *Frankenstein* perhaps first so damningly announces; the world the blind man is incapable of seeing, and which the Monster embodies: the "new order of things looming above" as Clute succinctly puts it.

What distinguishes this collection of essays from other contemporary considerations of Science Fiction, Horror or Fantasy (or any subheading of these) is that with this book we are privy to the culmination of what can only be described as the philosophical development of a writer. Each essay, written for differing purposes between 1985 and 2011, with no thought of ultimately taking the shape they do here, and with no particular philosophical through-line that might argue for an ultimate telos, nevertheless adds up cumulatively to reveal a world-view and a hermeneutic that are both exacting and profound. In many ways this is Clute's most breathtaking account of the state of things, a philosophical whole much greater than the sum of its parts. The "breathtaking" aspect comes about from the audacity of what may be regarded as an ontological commitment: there is "a terrible new intimacy between works of the imagination and the reality of things" (3). Writing just after the events of 9/11, Clute can conclude that the "portents of terrible change" that SF in particular commits itself to seem to have been imagined and written—written on the world, in the case of 9/11—by

both SF writers and the terrorists themselves such that "in 2001 that story is a story which is not only told but is the case" (5).

As always with Clute we find within these essays an uncompromising commitment to *story* and the storying of our world. Again, this is because of the inevitability of his ontological commitments; he is arguing not about a literature that *represents* the world, but one that *presents that which is the case*: what you see is what you get, as he says. This presentational view of storying immediately precludes any fancy postmodern ironizing or meta-reflexive ploys that may be discovered or utilized by the critic:

> What we have to do…is to obey the tale: which means that, in the end, we do not ironize our reading, we do not condescend, we do not doublethink the telling. When we accomplish this simplicity, we may find that the story by itself supplies all the doubleness we could dream of. (7)

Clute ranges over a wide compass in this collection. Not only do we find meditations on key texts such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Crowley's *Aegypt* and the work of Silverberg, Disch, Wells and other luminaries but we also encounter diversions on Philip Glass's soundtrack to Reggio's *Koyaanisqatsi*, the music of Alban Berg, Bergman's film *The Serpent's Egg*, *No Country for Old Men* (both the book and the film) and Georges Simenon's Maigret. And I have touched only the surface in this eclectic list. If one ever thought that the art of the cosmopolitan essay is dead or dying then this book is certainly the cure for such an illusion.

I used the word "cosmopolitan" above as a deliberate index of the breadth of Clute's writing but also as a kind of pun. There is certainly a knowing urbanity inhering in all of Clute's writing, but that is not only what I was pointing towards. The writings collected within this book indicate a "citizen of the cosmos" (if I may be allowed to put it in such a SF-nuanced clichéd manner), someone who cares deeply about our place in the order of things, and about the order of things *themselves*. It is not a jaundiced, posthumanist eye that surveys the literature of the fantastic here, but rather it is a sensibility that is unafraid to look steadily at the dark Engine of the World and to trace its lineaments in the stories we tell ourselves. Clute's dedication to the critical life is thus both unflinching in the face of the horrors we endure and unwavering in its belief in the continuing value of keeping our illusions at bay.

Pardon This Intrusion is a book that any scholar of

the fantastic should look to for key critical tools necessary for an understanding of story and the particular literatures that have emerged in the West since the late 1700s. It is also a book that, perhaps inadvertently, narrativizes the development of a philosophical sensibility that is presently at the peak of its critical scanning of the world we inhabit.

In his essay on Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* (collected here) Clute notes that "the fantasy writers of the 1920s shared a defiant refusal of the official daylight world, and of the fictions that celebrated it. They refused to skate over the shame and poison of aftermath, refused to make life easy for survivors" (256). This is quite a fitting description of Clute's approach to his subject matter as well; we can clearly see whose side he is on, and why he is still enthused about the *fantastika* of the past two hundred years. Finally, one finds within these pages no academic certitudes, no empty scholarly methodologies that will leave one safe and asleep—here is a passion for the strange, turning gears of the cosmos, and for our stories of a world caught within them. ∎

Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep? A Science-Fictional Theory of Representation

Pawel Frelik

Seo-Young Chu. *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep? A Science-Fictional Theory of Representation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010. Hardcover, 306 pages, $39.95, ISBN 978-0-674-05517-9.

DO METAPHORS DREAM OF LITERAL SLEEP? has been an incredibly difficult book to review—not necessarily in terms of the density of its argument, although it does become thorny at times, but in terms of how it functions as a whole. On the one hand, it demonstrates breadth of reading and thinking; on the other, it contains statements that counter a great deal of recent SF scholarship. It also exemplifies some of the questions and painful decisions of contemporary literary or cultural criticism, including the most basic—what purpose should (does? can?) it serve?—assuming that we agree that such criticism has any function beyond intellectual exercise in the first place. Naturally, there

is no easy or clear answer to this and there may be as many answers as there are those engaged in the pursuit. Allow me to start with the positives.

Seo-Young Chu has clearly spent a significant period of time preparing the book—even if she has read only half of all name-checked fiction titles, this already accounts for a sizeable reading list so early in a career. Her capacity for finding connections between them is also admirable, even if some of them may appear questionable. Chu usually pads her argumentation with numerous examples. The scope of the work is also very ambitious, maybe too ambitious.

Do Metaphors Dream begins with a lengthy introductory and theoretical section that occupies almost exactly one third of the entire book; however, given the novelty of the argument such a distribution seems justified. Three major and intertwined assertions can be distinguished here: that science fiction is a mimetic discourse, that science fiction shares a great number of qualities with poetry, and that science fiction's task of representation relies on small narrative building blocks. Countering the common assumption that science fiction as a genre operates beyond or even counter to mimesis, Chu first proposes "a science-fictional theory of mimesis" (2), within which the genre "operates fully within the realm of mimesis" (3). Grounding herself in the supposition that "all reality is to some degree cognitively estranging" (7), the author suggests that "what most people call 'realism'…is actually a 'weak' or low-intensity variety of science fiction" while "what most people call 'science fiction' is actually a high-intensity variety of realism" (7). Consequently, in her theory, realism "designates low-intensity mimesis" while science fiction "designates high-intensity mimesis" (7). In itself, this is hardly a novel idea, even if not usually articulated in narratological terms. From Isaac Asimov, who perceived SF as fundamentally social literature reflecting the character of contemporary societies, to Istvan Csicsery-Ronay, Jr., who in *Seven Beauties of Science Fiction* repeatedly posits SF as driven by "circumstantial realism" (6) and following "the stylistic tradition of the realistic novel" (83), many science fiction writers and critics have acknowledged the genre's allegiance to the traditional methods of characterization.

Where *Do Metaphors Dream* differs from such earlier works is the end to which its author applies this common intuition. Chu attempts to construct a spectrum of fantastic genres suggesting that genres "often classified as both nonmimetic and non-SF are actually varieties of science fiction that correspond mimetically to

specific types of cognitively estranging referents" (9). Consequently, various bodies of fictions are presented as types of science-fictional mimesis, differing only in terms of the determining referent, which for surrealism is "the phenomenon of dreaming," for detective fiction (!)—"the mystery of ratiocination," and for fantasy—"the prodigious working of the human imagination" (9). One could obviously spend a long time picking these definitions apart—the suggested definition of fantasy is so nebulous that it could easily describe all other fantastic genres and still not say anything specific—but a review does not have the time nor space for this.

The second major assertion of the book is that in its literalization of metaphors, science fiction as a genre is inherently lyrical, sharing numerous qualities with poetry. Chu enumerates a number of these "rich symmetries" (15). Among them are the reliance on soliloquy, the use of lyric time (she cites the widespread use of simple present as bridging poetry and SF and suggests that the tense is "favored by otherworldly nonhumans" [25]), and the presence of verbal intensity. To demonstrate the latter, the author mobilizes two sets of five SF environments and five SF bodies whose narrative deployments exemplify the aesthetic impact very much akin to the poetic. Incidentally, these sets are only two of a number of such lists, strongly suggestive of the author's structuralist indebtedness. On the other hand, such listings are not invoked as aspiring to a systemic representation of varieties or options, consequently begging questions: why five and not six, why these and not others, and what other possibilities are there in the enumerated range? The last two general affinities between SF and poetry are musicality (the author mostly concentrates on the presence of aurality in narratives) and the capacity for representation of "heightened and eccentric states of subjectivity" (55), which occasions another listing of five of such states, including the section devoted to the "Eerie State of Subjectivity That Results from Knowing Objectively That One Is Somehow Other Than Uniquely Identical to Oneself" (56).

The third and last assertion of the book is tied to the environments and bodies just mentioned. For Chu, they are "objects of science-fictional description," which are not "the cognitively estranging referents to which works of science fiction mimetically refer." Instead, "they are instances of the units of the science-fictional medium," which she calls "*science-fictionemes*" (47). Defined as such, *science-fictionemes* seem to be smaller than themes or what Brian Attebery calls pa-

rabolas, but perhaps larger than individual nova and motifs. While this seems interesting as a concept, the definitional nebulousness seems to be at odds with the attempted systemic view. If situations, characters, or objects can become such building blocks, in what way are they useful or complementary or superior in relation to the already existing terminology of generic modularity?

The lengthy introduction concludes with the announcement of the core of the argument: five chapters focused on selected "Cognitively Estranging Referents," whose discussion also collectively includes "Over Fifteen Science-Fictionemes" (68). The five referents are: the globalized world, cyberspace in the 1990s, war trauma, postmemory han (derived from the Korean word for a form of grief), and robot rights. Each of these chapters briefly reiterates a range of issues involved and invokes predominantly literary texts oriented around these referents. More often than not, these discussions are relatively concise evaluations of individual texts rather than more extended close readings. As indicated earlier, as a whole, *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep?* is a very impressive work—both because of the density of constant references and the theoretical ambitions. It is, unfortunately, also very problematic in how it frames its propositions and what exactly they ultimately suggest—so problematic that I could risk stating that Chu's demonstrable analytical acuity and extensive research work have been somewhat misdirected.

The above brief summary is probably sufficient to discern Seo-Young Chu's debt to Darko Suvin's structuralist discussions of science fiction, if not in the actual object of discussion then in the method. However famous and infamous, Suvin's rigorous policing of the borders of the genre, including his famous dismissals of the pulps and Bradbury's fiction, was intimately enmeshed in the literary, but also political, landscape of 1970s academia and literary criticism. By 2010 the battlefields have changed radically and it is much harder to detect the agenda of Chu's analogous approach. This, of course, leads directly to the above-mentioned question of the purpose of criticism in general, which I will not even attempt to answer. Nor do I want to suggest that structuralist and narratological criticism of SF is outmoded or unnecessary. At the same time, the structuralist nature of the argument results in a contradiction.

On the one hand, the book attempts to create nothing less than a new theory of representation applicable to all fantastic (and some non-fantastic) genres, within

which such disparate bodies of texts as science fiction, fantasy, and surrealism are aligned together and governed by the same principles. In other words, Chu wants to create a unified field, which she insists on naming "science fiction." Whether this suggests any kind of primacy for SF among other genres is immaterial, and I do not think it does. On the other hand, almost all readings in the chapters that supposedly exemplify the outlined principles come from the more traditionally conceptualized "science fiction"; it would be far more interesting and productive to see how the suggested science-fictional theory of representation works in texts traditionally placed outside the genre's definitional boundaries. Furthermore, the study betrays very little, if any, awareness of the approach that has pervaded a significant majority of science-fiction criticism in the last decade or more. Even more than other genres of the fantastic, science fiction has been discussed as a constructed phenomenon which dynamically and dramatically changes over time and space, which not so much subsumes other genres as exists in highly complex and volatile relationships with them, and whose basic definitions differ dramatically depending on the interpretative community in which it functions. This in itself does not, of course, mean that structuralist critiques are of little consequence, but the complete lack of acknowledgment of positions exemplified in Bould and Vint's "There Is No Such Thing as Science Fiction," Kincaid's "On the Origins of Genre," or, more recently, Rieder's "On Defining SF, or Not: Genre Theory, SF and History" is baffling in a work with such systemic ambitions. In fact, the only time that the author admits that "the continuum of referents and the continuum of representational modes are capable of changing over time" (8), she refers to objects which, when invented, may cease to be science-fictional and not the genre itself. In other words, culling together E. M. Foster, William Burroughs, Larry Niven, P. K. Dick, and Richard Powers in the service of a unified theory of representation is atemporal and flattens, rather than organizes, the rich repertoire of fantastic strategies they used in their fiction.

This enumeration is, in fact, emblematic of the other serious, methodological flaw of the study. In all stages of her argument Chu provides copious examples of motifs, situations, or bodies as present in a wide range of fictions. However reflective of the breadth of Chu's reading, they are also used in a tendentious and selective way, in which numerous examples, by their own sheer weight, seem to support the sweeping and generalized statements. However, enumerating five novels with a mad protagonist does not really tell the reader how popular or representative of the genre the motif of madness is. For example, as a proof of the affinities between poetry and SF, the author cites Pelham's covers of several Penguin editions of Ballard's novels from the 1970s that invoked the concept of timelessness and anachronism. Any research into the aesthetics and politics of genre covers will also demonstrate that Pelham's images are some of the few glorious exceptions in the mass of otherwise chaotically or even randomly assigned cover artworks. In the same way, the definition of slipstream as "a type of science-fictional mimesis whose cognitively estranging referent is the partially virtual reality of living in a mainstream hypermediated and rendered half-surreal by technology" (9) may be true for the examples used—DeLillo's *White Noise*, *The Truman Show*, and Ed Park's *Personal Days*—but is jarringly narrow and completely unrepresentative considering the range of texts and discourses attached to the term.

Consequently, *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep?* is a deeply conflicted study which at once testifies to the admirable ambition of a grand systemic view of science fiction and reveals the shortcomings of compartmentalizing theories at the time of "evaporating genre" (Wolfe 12), when the very notion of a genre is problematized and shown increasingly insufficient in the accounts of literary or cinematic texts. There are sections here that are interesting—for example, one devoted to the affinities between poetry and SF, or Chapter 4, which focuses predominantly on Korean-American writing and the issues of memory (although again it is not easy to fathom the exact affinity of Jane Jeong Trenka's *The Language of Blood: A Memoir* with the texts discussed elsewhere in the book). As a whole, however, *Do Metaphors Dream of Literal Sleep?* is an interesting, possibly challenging, but ultimately futile and at times misguided intellectual *gedankenexperiment*.

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The Generation Starship in Science Fiction: A Critical History, 1934-2001

Paul T. Beattie

THE DREAM OF HUMAN COLONIZATION in space has long persisted in science fiction. One solution to the "How?" of this dream is the generation starship, a vessel designed to support multiple generations of humanity in their journey through the depths of space. Drawing on works from Aldiss to Zebrowski, Simone Caroti has exhaustively researched this ship's appearance throughout science fiction—and science fact—to develop the text *The Generation Starship in Science Fiction: A Critical History, 1934-2001.* The subtitle is a misnomer, as Caroti freely discusses works falling outside of the given range on both ends, yet there can be no denying the thoroughness with which Caroti traces the development and depiction of the generation starship through nearly a century of prose, television, and film. Despite the book's identity issues—it sometimes awkwardly attempts to be a critical history of science fiction as a genre rather than of the generation starship itself—it offers insightful analysis when it does not drift towards acting as a history of the genre or an aesthetic critique of a given work under discussion.

The book is divided into six chapters flanked by an introduction and conclusion. In the introduction, subtitled "Death and Rebirth of a Dream," Caroti explains his focus on stories portraying multiple generations of humans living aboard a starship traveling at sub-light speeds, where the vessel in question is not a sleeper ship or gene-seed ship. However, as will be discussed later, some of his examples subvert this definition. Furthermore, although he posits a view of science fiction where even relatively conceivable, if unlikely, technology such as warp drives is more or less the stuff of fantasy, bound up in "pseudo-scientific trappings purporting […] to provide a rather thin justification for placing the resulting work of fiction in the SF shelf at the bookstore," he later praises the imagination of such works as *Star Trek* (10). Caroti also outlines the major problems involved in the generation starship concept, which will be the focus of his analyses later: the sheer distances involved in space travel, the social and generational changes experienced by the crew, and the economic issues involved in such an undertaking.

The opening chapters of the book cover the earliest incarnations of the generation starship but become mired in lengthy discussions of SF's heritage. In Chapter 1, "Fathers," Caroti credits Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, Robert Goddard, and J. D. Bernal with the creation of the generation starship in their nonfiction, a concept born out of dreams of a utopian human future. The second chapter, "The Gernsback Era, 1926-1940," deals with how the idea took root in the early days of SF magazines. Caroti's previous proscription of stories involving scientifically-implausible elements rings especially hollow here, as he discusses a story featuring both a miraculous rejuvenation serum—a clear contravention of Caroti's multi-generational restriction—and a colossal space-faring tentacle monster in the tradition of Lovecraft. In a trend that overshadows his critical analysis in various sections, Caroti here indulges in purely aesthetic critique by offering bulleted paragraphs describing ways in which Don Wilcox could have improved a story. Luckily, Caroti also discusses steps made in fiction towards analyzing problems of generational transmission and drift, key hurdles involved in lengthy interplanetary journeys, sustaining the reader's interest through prolonged segments of the history of early SF magazines.

In the third and fourth chapters, "The Campbell Era, 1937-1949" and "The Birth of the Space Age, 1946-1957," Caroti's aspirations to the role of science fiction historian entirely overshadow his treatment of the book's subject. The first half of the forty-odd page third chapter deals exclusively with the history of SF during this time, and the second half covers but a single duo of Heinlein tales, "Universe" and "Common Sense," as Caroti agonizingly walks the readers through every plot element of the two. Here, Caroti again engages in purely aesthetic criticism of Heinlein's work, distracting and detracting from the section's overall aims. The fourth chapter discusses only a handful of literary works while

focusing on larger trends in scientific discovery. Yes, the scientific background informs our readings of the generation starship, but much of chapters two through four—even the periodized nomenclature which relates exclusively to the history of the SF genre itself—has little to no relevance to a critical analysis of the generation starship. The few examples stemming from these years could have been condensed with a minimum of contextual information.

Caroti seems to hit his stride in the fifth chapter, "The New Wave and Beyond, 1957-1979." Gone are the excessive explications of SF history, replaced by insightful contextual analysis related to the ever-changing role of the generation starship. Caroti emphasizes how stories of this era are marked by a heightened, Cold War-spawned fear of the Other. His analysis of John Brunner's "Lungfish" highlights the dismissal of the need for a generation starship's mission, placing it in the context of a modernist shift away from optimism. Another contextual trend is the rise of environmental awareness, highlighted in analyzing Ballard's "Thirteen to Centaurus." Caroti's analysis is again hampered by an overreliance on summarizing and presenting every plot point of the stories equally, skewing the focus away from the generation starship. Finally, Caroti marks Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama* as a watershed in the genre, keenly noting its self-aware treatment of the generation starship, before hinting at the changes that the Information Age will bring to the subgenre.

In the final chapter, "The Information Age, 1980-2001," Caroti slips back into his old mistakes and spends the first section psychoanalyzing the character Dyson in *Terminator 2* and then bemoans the passing of classic SF. For example, he states—with no relevance to the generation starship—"However, while Asimov and Clarke largely contented themselves with staining the memory of the works of their prime, Heinlein in particular seemed to become more painful to read with every book he wrote" (196-7). Eventually, Caroti settles in to cover three generation starship narratives, including insightful discussions of the impact of cyberpunk on the subgenre, exemplified by Bruce Sterling's "Taklamakan." There is also a thought-provoking discussion of how the "Who would go?" question present in any generation starship narrative has evolved through different eras, a section that shines even amidst walls of summary. Caroti's description of Gene Wolfe's treatment of the world left behind by the generation starship—a rarity in the subgenre—is also quite interesting. However, the chapter ends with various musings

on modernity, the topics ranging from Chuck Norris to 9/11 to *True Lies*, diverting attention back away from the generation starship.

Caroti ends his book with a conclusion, "Trip's End?", which begins with further musings on the impact of 9/11 and a lengthy discussion of the role of advocacy in SF, again with no bearing on the generation starship. Finally, Caroti briefly describes several generation starship narratives published between 2001 and 2010, including the provocative possibility of *Discworld* as a generation starship, before signing off with a comparison of our own world to a generation starship.

Caroti's work functions adequately as a critical history of the subgenre of the generation starship narrative, though the analysis is often buried in excessive treatments of trends in SF, aesthetic critiques made in hindsight, and an overreliance on summarizing plot events. The book raises and addresses interesting questions about the origins and mechanics of the generation starship, as well as contemplating its changing role in SF, but only the most devoted scholar of the subgenre need apply. ∎

Fiction Reviews

The Alchemists of Kush

Patrick B. Sharp

IN HIS SF WORKS, Minister Faust imagines an Afro-centric past, present, and future America that attempts to reclaim African history and culture. His image of America at once tries to capture the importance of community—in this case, the local communities of Edmonton, Alberta—while showing Edmonton's intimate connections to communities in Africa and other parts of America. The concept of America that I am referring to comes from work in American studies over the past few decades. The term "America" has now been redefined in terms of the circum-Atlantic and circum-Pacific "exchange and interchange, circulation and transmission" of plants, animals, commodities, cultural practices, knowledge systems, and so much more that came with migration, voyages of discovery, colonial expansion, and post-colonial transformation (Armitage 16). "America" is at the same time a geographical

space and a constantly evolving cultural construction that is intimately connected with many other parts of the globe.

As a Canadian writer, Minister Faust's work exemplifies this new American studies paradigm as it impacts our understanding of American literary traditions in English. Minister Faust is the pen name of Malcolm Azania, an African Canadian (former) high school English teacher from Edmonton who is also a community activist and radio journalist. In his SF novels he blends African traditions with American popular culture in a style he calls "Imhotep-Hop." In his approach to African traditions, Faust takes on a perspective not unlike the one put forward in Martin Bernal's groundbreaking *Black Athena* (1991). Like Bernal, Faust emphasizes the importance of African civilizations for both European and American civilizations.

Alchemists is set in the Edmonton neighborhood "Kush." In his first novel, *The Coyote Kings of the Space-Age Bachelor Pad*, Faust described Kush as being populated by "Somalis, Ethiopians, Eritreans, and Sudanese," an embodiment of pan-African identity and comingling of various African religious and cultural traditions (50). The structure of *Alchemists* juxtaposes two stories. The first story—labeled "The Book of Then"—is a retelling of the origin myth of the ancient Egyptian gods Hru and Yinepu (a.k.a. Horus and Anubis). The second story—labeled "The Book of Now"—focuses on two teenagers from Kush named Raphael and Jamal (a.k.a. Rap and JC the Black Jackal). Each chapter is broken into two sections, with one section for the past and one for the present. The past and present stories chart the protagonists' parallel coming-of-age struggles to overcome "the Destroyers" and build healthy and sustainable communities. In his descriptions of the Destroyers, Faust does not simply demonize white people: like Laguna author Leslie Marmon Silko, he associates "the Destroyers" with colonization and death, forces that have afflicted people of all races and ethnicities. In "The Book of Then," the Destroyers are embodied in Hru's uncle Set, a man who murdered his own brother and established a brutal empire in Egypt. In "The Book of Now," the Destroyers take many forms such as African gunmen, rogue white cops, and neighborhood Somali gangsters.

The real center of the novel is Rap, and the story of Hru provides a mythical context for Rap's encounters with the various dangers and opportunities of his environment. Rap is half Sudanese and half Somali; as a child, he and his mother "escaped Sudan *on foot*," "sur-

vived a refugee camp in Chad," and eventually immigrated to Edmonton when he was eleven (70). In the course of the novel Rap becomes educated about African history under the guidance of a father figure named Moon and learns to contextualize his own traumatic experiences. Rap's growth is characterized by both pride in the achievements of Africa and an overzealous antagonism towards the ignorant "leadites" who don't know any better. This is exemplified early in the novel when Rap gets into an argument with a capoeira teacher. Rap takes exception to the *capoeira* teacher's assertion in public forums that "African slaves invented *capoeira*" (99). Rap asserts that,

> "All peoples were enslaved at some time. But we don't talk about them all like that. In Europe they called em serfs. Same thing as slaves, but nobody calls em that! The Nazis enslaved the Jews. But nobody says, 'The Nazis went to Poland, picked up the slaves, and used em to build stuff.' Why not?
>
> "Cuz people understand that Jews are human. That they know the Nazis didn' civilise them— they had history and language and culture and minds before the Nazis enslaved em."
>
> "But Leadites don't know that about us. All of us who got taken in the first Maafa or hammered in the second one! Leadites've been blinded into thinking we were always slaves. Which means they think that's all we'll ever be!" (99)

Through Rap, Faust attempts to reclaim African history from the racist formulations of nineteenth century anthropology—and from the implicit assumptions of much previous American studies work—that characterized all African peoples under the homogenizing term "savage." Faust rejects this idea of African savagery, characterizing the *Maafa* as an anomaly in a long-standing tradition of civilization. (The *Maafa* was the period where Africa was colonized and occupied by non-Africans, and it includes the history of racial slavery where millions of Africans were forced into bondage in America and elsewhere). Through the discoveries and education of his characters, Faust educates readers on African myths and the contributions Africans have made, and will continue to make, in the realm of progress. At the same time, Rap's over-reaction shows the dangers of alienating and attacking people who might have different perspectives: Moon makes Rap apologize to the *capoeira* teacher and lectures him about the importance of tolerance and respect.

Faust's first two novels were clearly science fiction. Both contained cyborgs and superheroes with super-powers. In *Alchemists*, the tale of Hru is mythological with characters transforming into animals while speaking transformational words of power. In a previous generation that would have meant that the novel would have been classified as fantasy. What makes *Alchemists* also science fiction is the persistence of the science fiction imagination in the present world of the novel. Rap is influenced by rap music, Egyptian mythology, and Afrocentric scholarship, but he also identifies with Static, a black teenage superhero in the DC universe. The structure of Rap's story resembles the origin stories of countless superheroes: he is alienated, he undergoes a traumatic experience with criminals, he finds a mentor to train him, he learns and develops his powers, and he begins to transform his community for the better. Science fiction references are strewn throughout the novel and form a central part of the imagination of the characters in the present.

The end of the book includes a section called "The Book of the Golden Falcon," which is the story of Hru written in the compact form of an ancient holy text. It has ten chapters that parallel the ten main chapters of the book, and it is referred to throughout the novel as the basis for the "alchemist" philosophy of Rap and his mentor. There is also a "Falconic Glossary" that is useful for keeping track of the many characters (and their many names) as well as the terms and concepts used in "alchemist" philosophy. *Alchemists* was initially released as an ebook and is now available in paperback. It is another important quality novel from Faust that helps expand our definitions and understandings of both "American" literature and science fiction. It is a challenging book, but it rewards the efforts of readers with a compelling and powerful narrative.

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The Tears of the Sun

Ed Carmien

IN WHAT IS NOW LISTED as a "novel of the change," *The Tears of the Sun* counts as the 11th book in a series. The first three constitute the tale of the isle of Nantucket squeezed thousands of years into the past by some unknown force, where the tiny population with science and knowledge on their side prevails against a barbaric world and a modern traitor who seeks his own evil empire. From time to time these exiles ponder what the rest of the world is doing—enjoying, no doubt, all the fruits of contemporary civilization, while they, poor souls, use their technology and wits to survive and spread good will.

Alas, all is not well back in the present, for the instant Nantucket vanishes, the rest of the world changes. Gunpowder no longer explodes, electricity ceases, and even steam engines no longer produce the physical work the laws of physics say they should. In essence, the world is plunged back to a time when muscle power and sundry forms of stored kinetic energy, like the spring or water pumped uphill, were all that humanity had to run its civilization.

The early novels set in Stirling's "emberverse" address the great dying off that necessarily follows, and in this the series is straight-up speculation. However, with the change have come powers: a practicing witch finds her spiritual communing is different, and in former Montana, a fanatic religion gains a prophet, a true, terrifying prophet who is more puppet for dark forces than a man. In the later novels of the series, this Church Universal and Triumphant (CUT) is the primary bogeyman, with an expanding empire growing like a cancer in the western part of the former United States. Stirling moves into more traditional fantasy territory, and the series becomes defined in large part by the magic at work in the story.

Earlier novels in the series played with Tolkien references: there are Rangers (of the Pacific Northwest) who have learned Sindarin, there was a successful quest for the Sword of the Lady with the traditional number in the fellowship (nine), and there have been battles, skirmishes, skullduggery, heroism, and vile treachery aplenty.

The Tears of the Sun is a bit of a disappointment for any reader looking for the action of the series to move forward. It serves to fill in narrative detail readers of past novels missed as the focal characters travelled east

to Nantucket—a mystical, changeling Nantucket—to retrieve the magic dingus necessary to oppose the spiritual power of CUT…and then traveled all the way back to the west coast. In the meantime, CUT forces and allies won with chicanery and vile magic assail the good folk of the west. That fight, on the battlefield and under cover of darkness, is sketched out for readers.

In the now of the series, the High King of Montival (see *The High King of Montival*, book 10) gathers his forces and plots a strategy that takes advantage of the CUT being pressed from all sides, for as in *The Lord of the Rings* the good guys have garnered allies wherever they travelled, and the CUT's evil ways have earned them enmity wherever they sought to stop the fellowship. Also in the now, the feared and capable High Constable of the Portland Protective Association recalls sundry battles and skullduggery, including several encounters with the villainous Baroness Liu.

These scenes fall short of a satisfying narrative, although they are effective taken piecemeal. Nothing demonstrates the role this chapter in the series plays more vividly than the closing line. On a bloody battlefield the High King declares, "He is coming…the Prophet. Sethaz is coming."

At least two more novels in the series are planned. Stirling's website names them *Lord of Mountains* and *The Given Sacrifice* (2012 and 2013). Expect more closure there. ■

The Moon Maze Game

Bill Dynes

Larry Niven and Steven Barnes. *The Moon Maze Game*. New York: Tor, 2011. Hardcover, 364 pages, $25.99, ISBN 978-0-7653-2666-9.

THE MOON MAZE GAME is Larry Niven and Steven Barnes's third sequel to *Dream Park*, published in 1981, and the first return to that universe since 1992's *California Voodoo Game*. The intervening years have not been particularly kind to Niven and Barnes' successful series. While their latest collaboration has episodes that capture the energy and excitement of the earlier novels, overall *The Moon Maze Game* suffers from a crowd of poorly developed characters and inefficient pacing. In their afterword to 1989's sequel *The Barsoom Project*, the authors describe their goal as "fantasy wrapped in science fiction wrapped in mystery." This latest novel layers a hard-science fiction veneer over a story of early

SF tropes caught up in an action-adventure narrative. The resulting mix has legitimate appeal but never quite delivers on its promises.

The premise of the Dream Park novels blends role-playing games, Disney-esque animatronic wonderlands, and virtual reality to position players within a fantastic space where they must solve puzzles and overcome physical challenges. The live-action Dungeons-and-Dragons structure allows the authors to indulge in fantasies of magic and myth within a science fiction framework, and the combination can lead to interesting challenges. Battling a Martian war machine from Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, for example, the gamers and their adversaries find themselves targeted by deadly heat rays that turn out to be mere light shows. Yet this mélange of technologies is actually part of the problem with the novel; as forward-thinking as the Dream Park may have seemed when the first novel appeared, it feels quaint today. Niven and Barnes are still operating within the constraints of the technologies they imagined thirty years ago, and while transporting the location of the game park from California to the moon does open up some new possibilities, all too often those go unexplored.

At some level the authors have embraced this retrograde perspective, populating the novel with characters whose personalities will be familiar from the serial films of the 1930s or the B-picture "sci-fi" films of the fifties – the noble hero is here, as is the manipulative scientist behind the scenes and the self-sacrificing martyr. Female characters are more psychologically developed and engaged in the action of the novel than those older prototypes, but this is marred by the rather tiresome constant references to their physical charms. This may be another reference to pulp conventions, but it does seem overused here.

The most compelling element of the novel's mining of science fiction's past is rooted in the Moon Maze game itself. The gamers are charged with rescuing Professor Cavor, who has disappeared after making contact with the Selenites, an insectoid race living upon the Moon. As my earlier mention of Martian war machines may have suggested, the Moon Maze game draws broadly upon the work of H.G. Wells, focusing of course on *The First Men on The Moon*, but drawing also on *The War of the Worlds* and even essays on gaming. The game's design draws the participants into a struggle between the Selenites and Martians with Earth itself at stake, and some of the most interesting episodes are those in which the gamers must solve puzzles dependent upon Wells's fic-

tion. Readers familiar with Wells may find themselves working along with the characters themselves to anticipate the challenges the game poses.

Unfortunately, the Moon Maze game has been compromised by political intrigue; one of the participants is an African prince, and a terrorist group has chosen to use the game as cover for a kidnapping attempt. The narrative thus becomes the story of three distinct groups: the players who are racing to exit the game, the kidnappers who are pursuing them with increasingly deadly intent, and the game's controllers and lunar authorities, watching from outside and struggling to find ways to help. The game cannot be aborted because the terrorists have seized the installation's power supplies, and so the chase must continue from one episode to the next.

Ironically, this complicated narrative structure, combining the action-adventure plot with the role-playing game, is both the novel's strongest feature and its greatest challenge. There are moments of real tension, and when the players are able to use the game's technologies and puzzles against their pursuers, the effect is entertaining. However, the novel is significantly overpopulated, and it is not until the chase is on, nearly a third of the way into the story, that the many characters settle out into clear relationships. This is a familiar issue in Niven's more sprawling novels, which often include a list of dramatis personae to assist the reader; that would have helped here, too. But the Moon Maze truly is a maze, often confusing to both the participants and the reader, and the frequent abrupt cuts from one point of view character to another—an effort to build tension—often become merely distracting. The habitat where the game is being played consists of scores of spheres arrayed in nine layers, all built atop an aquifer, and as the kidnappers hunt their prey it often becomes difficult to work out the spatial relationships involved. That confusion works to the benefit of the players, but not necessarily to that of the readers.

Perhaps the most disappointing element of the novel is its refusal to take full advantage of its setting. The game is hyped as the first of its kind off-world, and the lunar environment inspires the references to H. G. Wells. But the authors often choose to concentrate more on the speculative fancies of *The First Men on the Moon* rather than the moon itself, with the result that the novel rarely communicates an effective sense of place. The setting does impose some useful limitations upon the narrative; the one time the players are forced to go outside the station's bubbles is a powerful episode. Yet this moment also serves to remind the reader how fascinating

the game may have been had more of it seemed to be on the moon as we understand it now, perhaps exploiting the differences between Wells's imagination and current science. The novel is dedicated to "the twelve who've walked there," and more of that sense of place would have been valuable.

Crowded and often confusing, *The Moon Maze Game* is an entertaining adventure that never quite delivers on its promise. After a nearly twenty year hiatus, fans may enjoy this return visit, but the novel is unlikely to draw new fans back to the earlier stories. ■

Media Reviews

C. S. Lewis on DVD:
A Review Essay

Bruce A. Beatie

The Life and Faith of C. S. Lewis: The Magic Never Ends [videorecording]. A production of Crouse Entertainment and the Duncan Group. Written, produced and directed by Chip Duncan. With Ben Kingsley, narrator. Milwaukee, WI: Duncan Group & Crouse Entertainment Group, 2009. DVD, 85 minutes. ISRN 0–339-3703-821-1. $24.95.

C. S. Lewis: Beyond Narnia [videorecording]. Faith & Values Media and BBC present a Windbourne Production in association with Lightworks Producing Group. Produced by Karen Pascal, written and directed by Norman Stone. Broomfield, CO: Gaiam, [2006]. DVD, 54 minutes, ISBN 978-07662-7499-1. $14.95

The Narnia Code [Video recording. Presented by] IA Production in Association with Odyssey Networks. Produced and directed by Norman Stone. Port Washington, NY: E1 Entertainment, [2011]. DVD, 59 minutes. ISBN 978-1-4172-3453-9. $14.99.

THE MOST IMMEDIATE associations aroused by the phrase "C. S. Lewis on DVD" are likely to be to the recent series of Disney films of the first three books in "The Chronicles of Narnia" (2005, 2008 and 2010). But there is more. The Internet Movie Database lists three earlier versions of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, all initially TV productions (1988 live-action, 1979 animated, and 1967 live action); the 1988 producers and cast also filmed *Prince Caspian* and the *Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1989, joined as a single film), and *The*

Silver Chair (1990, with Tom Baker of *Dr. Who* fame as Puddleglum). All but the 1967 *Lion* are available on DVD.

My concern here, however, is not with film versions of Lewis's fictions but with three recent documentary films about Lewis as man and author—the newest one (2011) potentially quite controversial. Yet even these three documentaries do not represent Lewis's first appearance on film. In 1985 the BBC produced the 90-minute television film, *Shadowlands* (aka *C. S. Lewis Through the Shadowlands*, in its VHS tape version), the story of Lewis's late-in-life relationship with and marriage to the American Joy Gresham; the screenplay was written by William Nicholson and directed by Norman Stone (who also directed two of the DVDs discussed here), with Joss Ackland as Lewis and Claire Bloom as Gresham. Nicholson adapted the screenplay for the stage in 1989, and on Broadway it won a Tony nomination. The play then served as basis for the 1993 theatrical film *Shadowlands* (133 minutes); Nicholson's new screenplay was directed by Richard Attenborough, with Anthony Hopkins and Debra Winger.

I

Though Lewis appeared as a character in these films, they too are fictions. The first documentary that treated Lewis's life and works as a whole was *The Magic Never Ends: The Life and Work of C. S. Lewis* (60 minutes), a 2001 co-production of Crouse Entertainment Group, the Duncan Group, and Chicago's WTTW-TV; after broadcast, it was issued both as a VHS tape and as a DVD; the latter was reissued in 2005, probably to take advantage of the theatrical release of the first of the Disney "Chronicle" films, as a "Collector's Edition" with 25 minutes of "Bonus Material." Its 2009 reissue with a revised title is identical in content to the 2005 "Collector's Edition."

Narrated by Ben Kingsley, the film opens with images of the coincidence, on November 22, 1963, of Lewis's death, the assassination of John Kennedy, and the release of the Beatles' second hit album, With the Beatles. Using still photos and film (some archival, mostly photographed by Chip Duncan and Bob Huck), it presents the life of Lewis from his birth to his death, with a focus on his writings—in a filmed interview that is the last of the "bonus materials," Chip Duncan comments that "his work means more than his life." Both life and writings are discussed, in well-edited segments, by reputable Lewis scholars (Lyle Dorsett and Christopher Mitchell, both former directors of the Wade Center at Wheaton

College, a research center devoted to the work of seven British authors including Tolkien and Lewis; Colin Manlove and Dabney Hart, authors of books on Lewis) and by people in his life (his step-son Douglas Gresham; Walter Hooper, his former secretary and trustee of his estate; and Debra Winger, who played the role of Joy Gresham in *Shadowlands*).

The Magic Never Ends won an Emmy and two other awards in 2003, and merited them. It is fascinating, informative, and balanced in its presentation, providing clear interpretations of both Lewis's "Chronicles" and his Christian apologetics. The editing is excellent: narration and filmed interviews shift seamlessly from people to images, with a supportive musical score; the nature photography of the Oxford vicinity and the Cotswolds is especially beautiful.

The "Bonus Material" consists mostly of segments from the film, especially the first three very short segments ("A Brief Introduction to C. S. Lewis," "A Brief Tour of the Kilns," and "A Brief Tour of the Cotswolds and Oxford"). The last item, "Bibliography," is a one-page listing of representative works by Lewis. The fourth, however, is truly interesting: "An Interview with Writer/Director Chip Duncan," who talks for fifteen minutes about Lewis and the meaning of his work and about the problems of making a documentary about him; he mentions "the complexity of The Lord of the Rings that is not in the 'Chronicles'" with their "simplicity of vision," but is present in Lewis's "space trilogy." His comments may anticipate a sequel recently completed by the Crouse group, "A Quest for Meaning: Myth, Imagination and Faith in the Literature of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis" shown last October at a C. S. Lewis Festival in Petoskey at the top of Michigan's Upper Peninsula (where young Ernest Hemingway spent his summers) and which will see "national airing" in 2011 (http://www.harborlightnews.com/atf.php?sid=11370&current_edition=2010-10-06).

II

Though the second documentary, *C. S. Lewis: Beyond Narnia*, covers much the same material, it could not be more different in format and emphasis. It concentrates on Lewis's life, with only occasional references to his works. And his life is presented as a narrative by C. S. Lewis himself (acted convincingly by Anton Rodgers) sometime in 1963, the last year of his life. The film opens with a boy walking in an attic, passing a huge mirror in which Aslan appears, walking downstairs to a large wardrobe with a wooden door, opening it and finding it

full of coats; while that sequence seems initially a reference at once to *The Magician and His Nephew* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*), the boy turns out to be an actor portraying Lewis as a child; title and credits appear over this action. Anton Rodgers as Lewis then appears before a wardrobe with a mirrored door, saying, "I've always believed in miracles." As he continues talking about creation, we see him seated in his study (presumably at The Kilns), and a legend identifies the time and place as "Oxford 1963." He begins telling about his childhood, and we see Lewis and his brother as children, with the legend "Northern Ireland 1903."

The remainder of the film follows the pattern established by what I've just described: segments with "Lewis" narrating (sometimes seated or moving about the study, sometimes as voice-over during or introducing an acted scene), alternating with the acted scenes (in a few instances, we hear some of the dialogue of the acted scenes). I have not tried to track down the sources of the narration (the lack of subtitles for the hearing-impaired makes this difficult), but I recognize some sentences from Lewis's *Surprised by Joy* (1955) and *A Grief Observed* (1961); others, I believe, come from his letters. While the "autobiography" is necessarily sketchy (51 minutes), it generally accords with the standard biographies (see especially A. N. Wilson's, 1990). There is, however, one decidedly misleading section—the unusually long acted scene of Lewis and his brother housing, at The Kilns, four children sent out of London because of the bombing, an experience that "Lewis" calls "an invasion." In this DVD "Lewis," harried by their noise and demands, decides to write a fairy tale; gathering them and his brother, he begins reading aloud the opening words of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. "Lewis" then tells of its publication, and a following acted scene shows Tolkien's negative reaction. But the refugee children were there in 1939, the novel wasn't completed until the summer of 1949, and not published until the fall of 1950. The only basis for the scene with the children is a short paragraph scribbled "on an odd sheet which has survived in the manuscript of *The Dark Tower*" (an incomplete sequel to Lewis's *Out of the Silent Planet* published in 1977, and about which there is some doubt about its authenticity). The paragraph begins: "This book is about four children" who "were sent to stay with a very old professor who lived all by himself in the country" (Green and Hooper's biography, 1994, 238). It names the actual children staying with Lewis in 1939, but there is no evidence that it was read to the children, nor that anything more than this brief paragraph was written before 1948.

Otherwise the film presents a fairly authentic summary of Lewis's life, with emphasis on his conversion (12 minutes) and his relationship to Joy Gresham (20 minutes, including his mourning); it assumes the audience's knowledge of the Narnia books, which (except for the misleading scene described above) are mentioned only in passing. The only substantive reference to any of the books comes at the end, when "Lewis" reads the final words of *The Last Battle*, about "Chapter One of the Great Story, which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before." "Lewis" says "I can't wait," and the film ends.

The production is well up to BBC standards. Anton Rodgers gives a thoroughly believable performance as the old Lewis (almost 66 for the narration, in his 50s for the acted scenes with Tolkien and Joy; Rodgers died at 74 the year after this film was made); Diane Venora (who played Hamlet in Joseph Papp's 1963 New York Shakespeare Festival production) is convincing as Joy Davidman, the only other significant speaking role. The film offers less substance than *The Magic Never Ends*, but is entertaining and well worth a place in the libraries of Lewis's readers. (The lack of subtitles is unfortunate, and the "Bonus Features" referred to on the box require, we are told when we click on their place on the menu, "a personal computer capable of playing DVD movies to access content." Since my old computer is not so capable, I cannot comment on them.)

III

The Narnia Code was originally produced in 2009 for the BBC, and was broadcast on BBC One, Four and HD five times between April 16 and October 18 of that year. Presumably because of the release of this DVD version, "this programme is not available to watch again" on the BBC archives (http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00jz2qp). It is, according to that BBC One website, a "documentary examining claims [by Michael Ward, Chaplain of St. Peter's College, Oxford] that C. S. Lewis's Narnia Chronicles contain a hidden meaning." Like both of the DVDs discussed above, it is handsomely produced and should be of interest to anyone with a liking for Lewis or the Narnia books. It is also, one has to say, a kind of intellectual infomercial for Michael Ward's 2008 book *Planet Narni: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C. S. Lewis* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press)—see my forthcoming Extrapolation review.

The format alternates between voice-overs (mostly during videos of scenes from Lewis's life and environ-

ment or illustrative still graphics), talking heads (most often Michael Ward, listed in the credits as "Presenter," and other scholars mentioned below), and acted scenes—all of which are very brief clips from the acted scenes in *Beyond Narnia* (uncredited, though the producer and director is Norman Stone, who wrote and directed *Beyond Narnia*). There are clips of most of the scenes in the earlier film up to the one of Tolkien's negative reaction to *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*—except, doubtless wisely, the one with the 1939 children). A commentator on that Tolkien scene notes "Tolkien was a jerk," adding "I'm just kidding." The new acted scenes are of Ward, after his "eureka moment," doing research at Wheaton College, where most of Lewis's papers are held; and, after he'd completed his manuscript, approaching Cynthia Read, Executive Editor for Religious Studies at Oxford University Press in New York.

In terms of content, the video opens with the long-standing question raised by Lewis critics as to whether the Narnia books have some sort of organizing principle or are just "a hodgepodge." The answer begins by reviewing Lewis's life (minutes 3-16) from his childhood to the point where, in 1948, he began writing *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The acted scenes make this section quite lively, but the view of Lewis's life is both highly selective and slanted toward Ward's theory: stress on Lewis's development of a desire for secrecy (scarcely mentioned in any of the biographies) and the importance for his turn to children's fantasy of the Socratic Club debate in early 1948 in which philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe "trounced him" (according to one commentator—an influence downplayed in all but one biography). It de-emphasizes the influence of Tolkien on Lewis's writing, ignoring, for example, the fact that Lewis began thinking of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in late 1939 (see above to *Beyond Narnia*), in the shadow of the "best-sellerdom" of Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and shortly after Lewis published the "space fantasy" *Out of the Silent Planet* (1938), a book instigated by Lewis's agreement with Tolkien that he would write a space-travel story while Tolkien would try a time-travel story.

As to the exposition of Ward's theory that the unifying pattern of the Narnia books are the seven planets of the medieval Ptolemaic universe (to which the film devotes two-thirds of its footage), I will not repeat the doubts I expressed in detail in the *Extrapolation* review. The theory is controversial, but all of the scholars who appear as commentators are enthusiastic support-

ers, and most of them are theologians and/or Anglican priests as well as Lewis critics.

This DVD also has "Bonus Featurettes" (without subtitles). The first, "Three Friends," in which Ward interviews Simon Barrington-Ward, Bishop of Coventry; Prof. Evelyn Ebsworth, retired chemist; and Walter Hooper. In "Heart and Home," Ward narrates visuals of key locations in Lewis's life (Magdalen College, The Kilns, and The Eagle and the Child). Most interesting, perhaps, is the last, "Heart of the Code," in which Ward explains the essence of his theory: "in one uncut answer" (14 minutes).

The three DVDs discussed here are about as different from one another as three films on a single figure can be, all are worth viewing, and all are currently available from Amazon. *The Magic Never Ends*, however, is in my view not only the most balanced and accurate of the three, but also the one that remains most valuable and most likely of interest to the readers of this journal. ■

The Thing [film]

Mark Young

The Thing. Dir. Matthijs van Heijningen, Jr. Perf. Mary Elizabeth Winstead. Universal, 2011.

BEFORE ITS FIRST FILM ADAPTATION into *The Thing from Another World* (1951), John W. Campbell, Jr. published the novella "Who Goes There?" under the pseudonym Don A. Stuart in the August 1938 issue of *Astounding Stories*. The original story stages an encounter between an American meteorological research team stationed in Antarctica and an alien being they discover frozen within twenty-million-year-old ice. The claustrophobic, blizzard-hemmed weather outpost, isolated from civilization and rank with man-sweat, seal blubber, and fuel oil effluvia, provides a perfect setting for the eventual descent into paranoia brought about by the realization that the pseudo-vegetal Thing—now thawed and reanimated—possesses powers of metamorphosis, overtaking and mimicking any life form with which it comes into close contact. As it slowly and imperceptibly clones the dogs, cows, and men of the outpost, it becomes clear that the protean monster poses a threat to the biosphere of the entire Earth. A series of tests are devised to differentiate Earth creatures from their alien impostors, a hunt ensues, and the Things are eventually destroyed.

Compared to the fifties film version, which substitutes a single, radioactive vampire-brute for Campbell's

shape-shifting aliens, John Carpenter's film version of *The Thing* (1982) more closely corresponds to the original plot and characterization, with the added detail of a nearby Norwegian station whose crew first discovers the alien ship. By investigating the burnt-out ruins of that group's camp, the Americans find a series of charred, grotesquely disfigured remains that seem uncannily humanoid, as well as videotapes of the Norwegian team uncovering an alien being from deep within the ice. Carpenter's twist heightens the original tale's considerable suspense by adding the mystery of what has happened at the nearby camp, one whose solution the audience must infer from the chaos left behind and the more vivid, eventual destruction of the American outpost as the Thing infiltrates its ranks. What Matthijs van Heijningen, Jr. attempts to contribute to Carpenter's version, then, is an answer to the lingering question: what really happened at the Norwegian camp? The answer ultimately disappoints, arriving in the form of a slavish homage to Carpenter's film that confusingly blurs the line between remake and prequel.

The executive decision at Universal to rework *The Thing* for a new generation must be seen in the larger context of SF film in our cultural-economic moment. In an era of increasing financial conservatism in Hollywood engendered, in part, by the realities of Internet piracy and its effects on box office revenues, the reigning creative logic at the big studios is clearly that of the *Sure Thing*. The sequels, prequels, remakes, reboots, trilogies, two-parters, spin-offs, adaptations, and franchises that dominate contemporary mainstream cinema represent desperate attempts to garner interest from both the familiar—those with fond memories of the original incarnation—and the uninitiated, repackaging the successes of a bygone era for a double crop of consumers. Scoring the next *Star Wars* or *Iron Man* seems to be the underlying game, though one which, to be fair, sometimes we all get to win. The wild popularity and critical acclaim of the recent *Battlestar Galactica* television remake, for example, shows that thoughtful writing in response to current politics, coupled with an appropriately updated "skin" of CGI effects, can greatly enhance the original concept—satisfying fans old and new, while guaranteeing the studio's desired financial return. *The Thing*, however, offers no such balance between studio and audience concerns, and, as a result, it fails both artistically and financially (as the weak box office suggests).

The van Heijningen, Jr. version reenacts the plot arc, the setting, the musical score, the outpost architecture, the blood testing, and other aspects of the Carpenter version, with a great deal of fannish obsession obviously devoted to developing even the most arcane details of the earlier film—how an axe becomes embedded in the wall of the Norwegian station, for example, or the exact placement of a charred, split-faced Thing which will be retrieved from the research station and autopsied by the Americans. The computer-generated special effects deliver the wild transformations and gore of its trailblazing, lower-tech predecessor but seem overwrought and often unbelievable in comparison. Many of the live action characters, too, fail to achieve development or garner any sympathy; rather, they seem like cardboard cutouts awaiting the inevitable shredder.

The film's major addition (and exception to the above) is the inclusion of a female heroine, Kate Lloyd (Mary Elizabeth Winstead), a Ph.D. student in paleontology, flown into the Norwegian camp as a consultant to their research team. Putting aside the unlikelihood of foreign doctors trusting an American graduate student to advise them about the find of the century, Lloyd's presence helps save the film from utter irrelevance. For one thing, her character helps contextualize the lack of female characters in both Campbell and Carpenter's versions as products of a bygone era, where both science and science fiction were scripted as the ideological bailiwick of men. Not that this film truly innovates in that respect. In fact, it self-consciously recasts Lloyd as a kind of Ellen Ripley, the intrepid, intelligent, and indomitable pilot who challenges a male-dominated order throughout *Alien* (1979) and its sequels. Like Ripley, Kate Lloyd clashes with arrogant men of science whose decisions endanger the rest of the crew. She keeps her cool under fire; she learns to wield a flamethrower; she kicks extra-terrestrial ass; and, in the penultimate scene in which Lloyd faces the alien, van Heijningen's mise-en-scène pays homage to the final scene of *Alien*, with Ripley locked in an escape pod and in close proximity to the dripping, chitinous monster. As with the rest of the film, such allusions and close attention to the genre tropes preceding it largely remain a play of surfaces without any added depth.

All in all, *The Thing* might best serve to further illuminate the contours of contemporary feminist SF, particularly if juxtaposed with other filmic manifestations of SF heroines and their counterparts in the novels of, to name just a few, Joanna Russ, Octavia Butler, Margaret Atwood, and Nicola Griffith. Through close attention to the limitations of mimetic representation inherent in various mediated forms of SF—and equal attention to the cultural-economic situatedness of those

media outlets—both teacher and student alike might more thoroughly disentangle artistry from hype. The Thing should be seen as an exemplar of the latter; it is a cautionary tale about how the material constraints of a society can negatively affect the felicity of its cultural products. Thus, to analyze this film as part of a larger trend in assembly-line SF filmmaking allows a sober vantage from which students might better judge both the limitations and possibilities inherent in such a system. They might also gain a keener appreciation for those rare SF films—independently produced (*Moon*) or mainstream (*Inception*)—that manage to successfully navigate both the economic logics and genre tropes in a fresh, innovative way. ∎

Never Let Me Go [film]

Alfredo Suppia

Never Let Me Go. Dir. Mark Romanek. Perf. Carey Mulligan, Keira Knightley, Andrew Garfield, and Charlotte Rampling. Fox Searchlight, 2010.

MARK ROMANEK'S *Never Let Me Go* (2010) is the film adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's homonymous novel (2005) about a love triangle of clones condemned to live as compulsory organ and tissue donators in a dark genetic utopia. This is one more film about cloning and organ trafficking, much like Darren Lynn Bousman's *Repo! The Genetic Opera* (2008), Michael Bay's *The Island* (2005), and Miguel Sapochnik's *Repo Men* (2010). A clear connection can be seen throughout all four of these films. All four are variations on the same theme, except that Romanek's film—an Anglo-American production—is the only one that lacks the pyrotechnics and acrobatics of the American blockbuster or typical action movie.

Ishiguro's novel might be considered as an opportunistic SF incursion of a celebrated mainstream author, with truly no original contribution to the genre. But the film manages a tense, suffocating atmosphere that is rare in psychological dramas of this kind. Kathy (Carey Mulligan), Tommy (Andrew Garfield), and Ruth (Keira Knightley) begin their friendship as children in the 1950s as inmates in Hailsham, a typical English boarding school. It is worth remembering that *Never Let Me Go* is an alternate history film. Its novum, or utopia, is shifted to a past, alternate version of the 1950s in which human cloning has been already established as a well-known technology. A breach of decorum by one of the boarding school teachers, who is shaken by the grim purpose of Hailsham's facilities, reveals to the children their sad fate: they will not have any future or life worthy of their own. They are just repositories of tissue parts, living only to provide organs to their "originals." Their survival will be the measure of their luck—and physical endurance. Some begin their task as donors very early, others later. Some manage to postpone their donations. Some do not survive the first donation, while others still live, for better or for worse, even after three surgical interventions.

In this context of "genetic utopia"—or, rather, dystopia—Kathy, Ruth, and Teddy grow, love, separate, and reunite. Kathy delays her first donation by assuming the role of a caretaker of the other clones. Working for the system, she finds Ruth now very weak and debilitated as a donor. The two set out to find Tommy, who has also started his "career" as an organ donor. Ruth does not survive her third operation after her liver is extracted for donation. Kathy and Tommy resume the love they have had for each other since their childhood. The information that stable clone couples may have their donations postponed, so that they can have a normal life for a short period, sounds like a last hope. Kathy and Tommy seek the postponement, but soon discover it is a hoax never confirmed. The film ends with Kathy alone, after the death of Tommy, about to undergo her first donation.

A subtle science fiction film with no special effects but which is ingeniously woven from a disturbing idea, *Never Let Me Go* could well have been produced in Argentina or Brazil. Despite the stellar cast (Keira Knightley, Charlotte Rampling), the film invokes the atmosphere of independent cinema. The same observations Jairo Ferreira said about Walter Hugo Khouri's *Voracious Love* (1984) could be applied to *Never Let Me Go*: "science-fiction film with no special or visual effects, *Voracious Love* is a rare example of the inexhaustible power of cinema as a vehicle for poetic suggestions." ("Vôo entre galáxias," *Filme Cultura*, nº 45, Mar/1985, 84. The same text can be found in Jairo Ferreira's *Cinema de Invenção*, 236). Rarely is a children's love story so tense and somber. The shallow depth of field in *Never Let Me Go* seems to simulate the thickness of its characters' lives: thin, lacking any horizon but the fleeting memory of their young faces in close-up. There is no world for Kathy, Tommy, and Ruth. Like the replicants in Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (1982), they are not human beings, but tools in the service of their owners. The difference, compared to *Blade Runner* and Andrew

Niccol's *Gattaca* (1997), is that passivity is the dominant tone in *Never Let Me Go*; the system is not challenged, the dystopia melancholically accepted with resignation—or apathy. Perhaps because Romanek's film deeply represents an increasingly evident contemporary sensibility, something which is expandable to cinema as a whole: the "implosion of dystopia," its current failure and eventual loss of meaning.

Much has been said of the collapse or decline of utopias, at least since the second half of the twentieth century, but we believe this paradigm has been already passed by an era of collapsing dystopias. Under a structuralist perspective, a dystopia makes sense only as opposed to a utopia or supposedly "neutral" reality. Today, however, dystopia is the norm; we live in a sufficiently dystopian world such that we can take negative utopias or pessimistic speculation for granted. This is our everyday, quotidian dystopia, and it is natural to us. The convicted children in *Never Let Me Go* might not exactly be the hypotheses, speculations, metaphors, or extras of a dystopia—its analogues are right here in the historical world, in our everyday world. They are the children of "peripheral," underdeveloped countries, victimized by wars and natural disasters. They are children abducted by organ trafficking organizations, degraded by child labor, and recruited by the drug and sex industries. They are children from societies in which life is worth little—and represent how cheap life is on the balance sheet of the world market.

A beautiful adaptation, *Never Let Me Go* helps to mark, alongside films like *Repo Men*, the decline of dystopias. If in the 1970s and 80s science fiction film was particularly exciting for its challenging of dystopias—films like *Blade Runner* and Richard Fleischer's *Soylent Green* (1973), for example—it has been at least since the late 2000s that our quotidian life seems to have significantly exceeded the bestiary of dystopias. "Health systems," as described in *Never Let Me Go* or *Repo Men*, are already out there (formally and informally), as the gap between reality and fiction is a mere figure of speech, a matter of rhetoric. In fact, these films reflect or speculate on the imposition of a capitalist logic over ethics and life in the wake of a phenomenon that has now come to stay. Anyone who depends on the Brazilian Health System (SUS) or the sinister private health plans can have the word. By the way, is there anything darker and more sinister than all that lurks beneath the fascist whiteness of a private hospital? ∎

Rise of the Planet of the Apes [film]

T. S. Miller

Rise of the Planet of the Apes. Dir. Rupert Wyatt. Perf. James Franco, Freida Pinto, and Andy Serkis. 20th Century Fox, 2011.

ARRIVING EXACTLY ONE DECADE after Tim Burton's commercially but not-so-critically successful remake of the original *Planet of the Apes* film (2001, 1968), relative newcomer Rupert Wyatt's *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* takes the form of a prequel/reboot self-consciously on the model of Christopher Nolan's *Batman Begins* (2005). Contrary to some expectations, the film has proved a success both at the box office and with most critics, and seems likely to launch a new branch of the franchise. One hardly needs to remark that the release of a film that so troubles the boundary between human and ape is also quite timely for literary studies in general and science fiction studies in particular, where critical animal studies has lately received an especially warm reception. As a second reboot of the ill-fortuned Apes series—arguably one of the most variable in terms of quality and even plot structure in SF cinematic history, descending by the fifth and final entry (Battle for the *Planet of the Apes*, 1973) to almost B-movie status—*Rise* is surprisingly solid, probably the first *Apes* film to approach the power and intelligence of the original. Nearly every scene contains an ethical dilemma, and, if the film addresses some of the questions it raises about biotechnology and human-animal relations either obliquely or simplistically, it still deserves praise for asking them. While far from perfect, and certainly not the resounding argument for great ape personhood that some might like it to be, the film could prove very useful in a course integrating animal studies, and for all of us it can serve as a fine starting point for approaching the difficult problem of the animal.

The film opens, tellingly, not in a sterile lab setting, but in the brutality of the violent capture of future laboratory animals. We soon learn that Will (James Franco) is the top scientist in a lab developing a viral gene therapy "that allows the brain to create its own cells" as a cure for Alzheimer's, but, in healthy primates, the therapy also begins to amplify brain function. (Of course, in a neo-Lamarckian twist, the augmented intelligence turns out to be hereditable to boot). After a minor PR disaster in the lab, Will decides to bring his work

home in more ways than one, smuggling out some of the brain-boosting formula for his Alzheimer's-afflicted father (John Lithgow) and an orphaned chimp named Caesar, a character created entirely by the motion-capture performance of inhuman extraordinaire Andy Serkis. As Caesar matures into full human-level intelligence, he finds himself caught between two worlds, and is eventually taken away from his home with Will and Will's love interest, the primatologist Caroline (Freida Pinto). The bulk of the film follows Caesar's subsequent efforts to escape the abusive conditions in his primate shelter, and Wyatt has chosen to devote only the final twenty minutes or so to the explosive action sequences that dominate the trailers, in which Caesar leads his fellow inmates to freedom all the way across the Golden Gate Bridge.

Readers familiar with the original Apes saga will recognize that this plot most closely resembles that of the fourth part, 1972's *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*, in which a different intelligent chimp named Caesar foments a full-scale revolution among the numerous apes employed as domestic servants in a near-future dystopia. *Rise* is in no way a remake of *Conquest*, but it does not ignore the earlier film, either, and the density of its allusions to and inversions of elements from the entire original series merits some comment. Of course, several of these references are simply throwaway winks and nods for the knowing: for example, because of the green flecks that appear in her eyes as a side effect of the gene therapy, Caesar's mother earns the nickname "Bright Eyes," the same name that the ape scientists had given to Charlton Heston's character in the original. In fact, the film has, perhaps, a few too many of these winking allusions, as in the case of the female ape who plays no real role in the film, but who is named "Cornelia" in honor of Dr. Cornelius from the first three films. Far more interesting is our brief glimpse of Caesar assembling a model of the Statue of Liberty in Will's attic: this is not simple homage to the famous place of Lady Liberty in the conclusion of the original film, but resonates with both Caesar's desire for freedom and his uncertain relationship with the state. In other words, this shot asks what it means to be an American ape, a chimp in the land of the free. *Rise* also engages intelligently with the film that is generally regarded as the second-best in the series, *Escape from the Planet of the Apes* (1971), dramatizing the key scene in Dr. Cornelius's historical account of the revolt led by an enslaved ape who one day said, "No." This articulation of refusal, when it comes in *Rise*, makes for a powerful scene that could have been laugh-

able had it been done poorly (think of Vader's infamous "Nooooooo. . . !" in *Star Wars: Episode III*). Finally, the prominent recurrence of the fire hose as a weapon of domination and humiliation against the apes recalls the racial allegory of the original film and its sequels, examined most thoroughly in Eric Greene's 1996 monograph *Planet of the Apes as American Myth: Race, Politics, and Popular Culture.*

Over the course of the film, *Rise* moves beyond race to consider the category of the animal itself more intensely than any other Apes film, although perhaps finally not as intensely as a serious animal rights activist might wish. An early series of scenes with the adult Caesar frames the problem most clearly, beginning with a kind of quasi-primal scene in which Caesar watches from the redwoods as Will and Caroline tussle on a picnic blanket down below. Yet Caesar's witnessing of this sexual foreplay in the Eden of the national park is not what traumatizes him, but rather the encounter that follows immediately upon it, when Caesar recognizes that Will drags him on a leash just like the dog walker that they have just met. With his large vocabulary of signs, a disturbed Caesar asks Will in succession if he is a pet, who his father is, and finally, "What is Caesar?" Promising a far more gruesome revelation than intercourse—namely, the revelation of the existence of the technological-industrial complex—Will then takes Caesar to see the lab that claimed the life of his biological mother and where his "father" labored to manufacture him. In other words, the question of what Caesar is may seem to invite meditation on the possibility of ape or animal personhood, but the film always maintains a safe distance from this position, in that it must emphasize Caesar's uniqueness and difference from all other animals, a difference ascribable only to his increased intelligence or even increased "humanity"—given to him, of course, by humans. After all, SF scholars know precisely what Caesar is: he is an uplifted animal, even if that uplift was inadvertent. Like all uplift narratives, then, the film must occupy a necessarily uneasy place in animal studies, for we must carefully consider the extent to which a given narrative truly attempts to understand animals on their own terms as animals, or merely as vessels waiting to be instilled with the spark of intelligence that will bring them to a real life—a human life—for which they can expect real rights and understanding.

This problem, the uncertain relationship of an uplifted ape to the real apes that exist today, is bound up with my greatest criticism of the film, which concerns how the non-uplifted apes look and act. Weta impress-

es with the effects, as always, and Andy Serkis's performance has justifiably received high praise; even so, one wonders if perhaps Serkis succeeded all too well in making a chimpanzee appear humanly expressive, that is, in making Caesar seem too human rather than like another type of being with which we currently share the planet. More problematic still are the various ways in which the other apes are humanized prior to their own uplift, and this anthropomorphism becomes most jarring in the segment of the film that plays out as a fairly straightforward prison drama, in which—I'm not kidding—the plot development depends on Caesar obtaining a shiv. I should note that Wyatt's only other film, *The Escapist* (2008), not coincidentally happens to chronicle a prison break; for the genetically enhanced Caesar to behave something like Tim Robbins in *The Shawshank Redemption* is perfectly fine, but for him to find his own Morgan Freeman in the wise old circus orangutan Maurice stretches plausibility and limits the ability of the film to comment on real animal issues. Maurice's complex signs and human gestures efface difference between the human and other animals in an almost cartoonish way, and, while I am hardly a primatologist myself, I must say that the film's depictions of primate social behavior appear to owe more to Oz than Goodall.

But the setting of the film in the Apes universe forces it to confront an even larger problem of "plausibility," namely, how such a topsy-turvy simian society could ever succeed human civilization. Thus, my father-in-law, a software engineer who places a high value on extrapolative plausibility in his SF, asked a doubly worrying question of me before we saw the film: "How are they going to have the apes take over—do you know how few of them there are on the planet compared to humans?" The second part of this question reminds us painfully that we are far likelier to cause the extinction of the other great ape species, many of them critically endangered due to habit destruction, than we are to uplift them or otherwise lose ground to them in the great Darwinian game. But we begin to grasp the answer to the first part of the question less than halfway through the film, when the viral vector accidentally infects a lab assistant: it appears that what makes the apes smarter also makes humans deathly sick. Unlike in the original *Apes* series, then, the Sword of Damocles hanging over human civilization is no longer the Bomb, which had even achieved the status of godhood in the most bizarre film in the series, that first sequel *Beneath the Planet of the Apes* (1970). Today, in *Rise*, it is not only biotechnology but also global interconnectivity that terrifies,

cleverly combined here in the specter of a man-made pandemic that, we come to understand, will sufficiently enervate the human race to allow the apes to take over. That the threat of the destruction of all that we know hangs over what begins as a charming tale of a boy and his ape contributes to the sense of unease one feels throughout the film: since *Rise* encourages identification with Caesar as a non-human, we can easily forget that the rise of the apes means the demise of the humans, but only for so long. The film's ability to provoke this intellectual unease and complex series of identifications and reorientations, far from being a flaw, is one of its great triumphs. Caesar, after all, arguably does commit a crime—or what would be considered a crime were he human—to merit his imprisonment. Or, not having acceded to the human social contract because he can have no rights under that contract, can he have committed any crime, at all?

It is safe to say that the *Apes* franchise has never articulated a consistent position on human-animal relations, or on the problems of violence and the domination of the other: Battle is particularly confused on these points, but we could say that *Rise* is confused in a much more productive and challenging way. For example, Caesar attempts to limit human casualties during his revolution, yet his justice remains strictly retributive, as we see him cage two of his handlers: the film only shows us how cycles of domination persist, how the oppressed can so easily become the oppressor. I even wonder if the CEO heading Will's lab (David Oyelowo)—an all but mustachio-twirling incarnation of pure capitalist evil—was cast as an African-American in order to build on the racial issues broached in the earlier films in exactly this direction. In other words, in Rise, a member of what was once a disenfranchised, even enslaved race now dominates the apes with a special callousness; by contrast, Conquest had emphasized repeatedly that the African-American character sympathized with the enslaved apes because of his own race's history. Again, however, the film does not portray the tendency of the oppressed to become a new oppressor as a human failing: we will notice that the uplifted apes immediately begin using horses in battle, binding other animals as tools of domination and making it all too clear that the rise of the planet of the apes is not a movement for animal solidarity, but exclusively ape solidarity. For all of its anthropomorphization of the apes, then, the film succeeds admirably in not inscribing the fallacy of the noble savage onto them.

In the end, *Rise* may offer a rather bleak statement

on sentient life, but, if the film finally does not seem to know how to solve the many problems it presents or answer the many questions it raises, that failure does not diminish its usefulness as a provocation to further thought and discussion. It would be an understatement to say that the *Apes* films are not known for their happy endings, and *Rise* in fact contains a happy ending for the apes—as we knew it must from the title—in addition to an apocalyptic coda for humanity that plays over the credits, an apocalypse that we also knew had to come, based on the setting of the original series. What are we to think and feel, then, to see an intelligent ape stand triumphantly in the branches of a redwood as the heroic music rises, looking out over a human city not long for the world? This is the key question that *The Rise of the Planet of the Apes* asks us, and forces us to experience and begin to answer for ourselves. ■

Cowboys & Aliens [film] and *Cowboys & Aliens* [graphic novel]

Dominick Grace

Cowboys & Aliens. Dir. Jon Favreau. Perf. Daniel Craig, Harrison Ford, and Olivia Wilde. Universal, Dream works, Reliance, 2011.

Van Lente, Fred, Andrew Foley, and Luciano Lima. *Cowboys & Aliens*. Created by Scott Michael Rosenberg. Los Angeles: Platinum Studios, 2006.

COWBOYS & ALIENS is the high-concept blockbuster loosely based on the graphic novel (GN) of the same name. Other than the basic concept—aliens arrive in the American west in the late nineteenth century, and end up in conflict against human forces hitherto enemies but now allied (cowboys and native Americans in the GN, those groups plus outlaws in the film), along with some fifth-column action by aliens opposed to the dominant overlord alien species—the film and the GN have little in common. Not even characters recur across the two works. Despite the differences, both takes on the concept are comparably mediocre.

Occasional moments of inventiveness are overwhelmed by cliché, even if sometimes the respective versions try to provide a bit of a twist on the familiar. The climax of the graphic novel, for instance, involves the hoariest of western tropes, the gunfight, and the twist on how the alien bad guy gets taken out (and really, is there any doubt who will win the gunfight?) hardly

compensates for the eyeroll-inducing familiarity of yet another showdown in yet another dusty town. Similarly, the film tries to work the father/son generation gap so common in westerns and even manages a gesture or two towards something a bit different. Colonel Dolarhyde (Harrison Ford) has a callow, bullying son (Paul Dano) who actually seems upset and repentant when he shoots someone, but, typical of the film's general failure to give characterization anything more than the most superficial of considerations, it fails to develop anything with the idea, so the so-called character arcs of the two figures are programmatic rather than organic.

The graphic novel does attempt to have a political point, in that it explicitly (one might suggest insistently) creates a parallel between the aliens as imperialist colonizing forces on a planetary level and Europeans as imperialist colonizing forces in North America. The opening pages of the graphic novel include split images, one half of the page showing the alien environment and the other the human one, with devices such as boats beside space ships, or the harsh right side of the face of a European matched up with the harsh left side of the face of a lizard-like alien, to drill home the parallel. Such an approach does little to discuss meaningfully the heritage of European colonization, but it at least broaches the topic and might allow for some classroom discussion of the use of SF for political purposes. Unsurprisingly, such overt politics are dropped from the film, though Dolarhyde has raised a Native (Nat Colorado, played by Adam Beach, a waste of a good actor), which stands him in good stead when the Native tribe needs to be convinced to go after the common alien enemy, rather than holding on to anti-white grudges. But Nat's worshipful attitude towards Dolarhyde and his tearful death scene with his adoptive father figure are not insulting only if you avoid thinking about it.

Thinking too much will undercut either work, but the filmmakers apparently assumed audiences needed even less in the way of plausibility than the comic's artists did. Implausible as the analog of aliens choosing to colonize planets like humans colonizing other countries might be, one can at least imagine the possibility (and heaven knows it's been imagined often enough), but the film eliminates this potential hot potato of a motivation by making the aliens simply another kind of gold prospector. If all they want is gold, why bother with the challenges of a planet when they could just mine the asteroid belt? Who knows? No character in the film might be likely to ask that question, admittedly, but filmmakers who cared at all about plausibility should have asked

it and could have found some passing line of dialogue to address the question at last superficially. But no, other than their desire for gold (and, of course, human experimentation, for ends that are opaque), the aliens are completely motiveless. They are presented as horrific monsters who, despite their advanced technology and interest in human experiments (the weapon Jake Lonergan [Daniel Craig] acquires is apparently some sort of mentally-powered medical tool that was being used on him—why it works as well for a human brain as for an alien one is among the numerous secrets kept from the audience), apparently are not possessed of language, since we never see them engage in any dialogue—except for the good alien, who assumes the sexy form of Olivia Wilde (how and when conveniently unexplained). By contrast, though the aliens in the graphic novel are as brutal and nasty as the ones in the film, they are at least depicted as possessed of language and some sort of social order.

In short, the film is illogical junk, trying to ride its high concept (and I admit I was intrigued by the idea, since historical settings for SF are so rare), focus on action, and star power roughshod over a thin script. The graphic novel is marginally more thoughtful but no less narratively superficial or silly (the Natives use anti-gravity devices to ride flying horses on an attack against the aliens; I doubt the creators grasp how risible that idea is)—as one might expect of a work "created by" someone who neither wrote nor drew the work itself. There are far better films dealing with similar themes—notably the recent *District Nine*, but even the recent episode of the television show *Supernatural* that took its protagonists back to the west via time travel ("Frontierland," aired April 22 2011), or the western episode of the original *Star Trek* ("Spectre of the Gun," original air date October 25, 1968—not the Kirk as Indian episode—"The Paradise Syndrome," from three weeks earlier the same season [!]) offer more interesting SFnal takes on the western. ∎

X-Men: First Class [film]

Catherine Coker

X-Men: First Class. Dir. Matthew Vaughn. Perf. James McAvoy, Michael Fassbender. Twentieth Century Fox, 2011.

AMID A SUMMER overloaded with superheroes and popcorn explosions, *X-Men: First Class* (*XMFC*) delivered both a searing character study and the queerest mainstream film in recent years. (If you don't believe me, read Jennifer Arrow's article "Magneto and Professor X Had Sex at the Movies This Summer—Did You See It?" at *E!Online*.) Nicknamed "Brokeback Mutants" by much of its audience, *XMFC* is first and foremost a love story between its protagonists, the pacifist and idealist Charles Xavier and the embittered Holocaust survivor Erik Lehnsherr. These two men, so very alike and so very different, will one day become better known as Professor X and Magneto. The dramatic crux of this origin story is that the audience already knows the ending, and, thus, the narrative follows the structure of a Greek tragedy far more closely than that of an action film. The viewer anticipates the rise and fall of these characters, and even though the ending is a foregone conclusion, the emotional payload and its intellectual afterimages leaves one surprisingly thoughtful long after leaving the theater.

The plot of the movie, a prequel to the other films in the *X-Men* franchise, rewrites the civil rights movement, the sexual revolution, and the Cold War as parallel issues to a new population burgeoning with super powers. The quasi-historical, quasi-fantastical feel of the film is enhanced by intermixing archival footage of the real players of the Cuban Missile Crisis with that of the fictional characters. These sequences owe much in both look and feel to cinema as well as historical fact, reminding the viewer of classic *James Bond* flicks, Snyder's *Watchmen* opus, and (particularly with Lehnsherr's Nazi-hunting scenes) Tarantino's *Inglorious Basterds*, albeit with less giddily explicit gore. The world of Marvel Comics functions as a kind of alternate history; much like the ahistorically integrated army of *Captain America*, the 1962 shown here is one where the traits of race, gender, and sexual orientation are afterthoughts to the possession of the power-granting mutant genomes. In fact, one of the many joys of the "swinging sixties" depicted here is its openness to playing with these aspects. Xavier, upon meeting young scientist Hank McCoy for the first time, eagerly greets him as a "fellow mutant" in front of his unsuspecting human boss, thus inadvertently outing him.

"Hank, you never told me!"

"Well, sir, you never asked, and I didn't tell."

Later, Xavier and Lehnsherr go on a recruitment mission to find other mutants set to the tune of Gnarls Barkley's "Run" which, while contemporary in form, is eerily prescient when acting as a period piece: "You can't win, child / We've all tried to / You've been lied to / It's

already inside you / You either run right now or you best get ready to die." If this isn't an anthem for a period of social unrest caught between cultural extremes—2011 as much as 1962—what is? This postmodern approach provides the viewer with a wide range of ways to effectively read—or teach—the film as a text.

The movie culminates its globetrotting plot with the expected confrontation between the "good" mutants who want to assimilate peacefully with human society and the "evil" mutants who want to engineer a nuclear holocaust of the majority of Earth's population. Like the show-downs of previous *X-Men* films, characters change sides throughout these fights, and it is up to the viewer to determine if any side has, or ever can, win even ideologically. The recurring motif of chess sets—Xavier and Lehnsherr play the game frequently throughout this film in addition to the others—not only reiterates that the two main characters are the leaders of opposing factions, but that all the others truly are pieces in their games, no matter how important they may have seemed before. It is in this fight that Erik knowingly accepts his fate as "Frankenstein's Monster": he is, after all, the destroyer that his Nazi torturer crafted him to be, even as he takes his vengeance. As he stated earlier in the film, and in many of the teaser trailers, "Peace was never an option."

It is also in this final sequence that the specter of tragedy is finally illuminated: as Erik deflects a storm of bullets, he heedlessly sends one careening into the spine of Charles. This sequence is not canon to the comic books from which the screenplay was (loosely) adapted; instead, the choice to disable Xavier through an accident at the hands of his closest friend transforms *eros* to *pathos*. Erik gathers Charles in his arms, declaring that he *needs* the other man by his side, and Charles just as tearfully informs him he cannot: he can condone neither genocide nor vengeance, just as Erik cannot be at peace with humans ready to register and exterminate him.

The intensity of that scene gave it the (only slightly humorous) moniker of "the divorce" in fandom, a usage that is aided and abetted by the actors themselves. In an interview with *The Telegraph* (Australia), James McAvoy (Xavier) states, "It is a little bit of a mini-tragedy that him and Magneto don't, you know, have sex and become married and become best friends." In another interview, Michael Fassbender (Lehnsherr) sings the lyrics of "Two Little Boys" to characterize the relationship between Xavier and Magneto. The song, written in 1902 and popularized in 1969, describes the friendship of two children who go onto fight—and probably die—

in opposing sides of the American Civil War; the song has likewise been adopted as the refrain to multiple conflicts real and imagined.

The conclusion of the film, such as it is, features Xavier good-humouredly acknowledging that, in his wheelchair he really is "a professor now. Soon I'll be going bald!" At the same time, Erik frees a former enemy from the government, declaring that he is now Magneto. Unlike the other Marvel films, there are no teasing hints at the end of the credits; instead, it offers itself as a closed text (though its popularity intimates that more films may be in the offing). The film has uses besides that of Saturday afternoon filler, and as mentioned before will probably prove useful in the classroom to newer students: in its use of viewer expectations it effectively demonstrates classical tragedy, while its nature as a composite text illustrates both literary and film rhetoric and a host of theoretical readings within the guise of popular genre film. ∎

The Book of Eli [film]

Arianna Gremigni

THE BOOK OF ELI (2010) reinterprets the post-apocalyptic film à la *Mad Max* (1979) by adding to it the narrative conventions typical of spaghetti western movies, the visuals of a graphic novel, and an overtly Christian moral dimension. This implies that the plot contemplates Eli, the protagonist, "kung-fuishly" dodging bullets, or engaged in the one against many type of fight, and that the cinematography, edited by director of photography Don Burgess—the man behind films such as *Spider Man* (2002), *Terminator 3* (2003), and Disney's *Enchanted* (2007)—is gritty and neat, thanks to the use of hard lighting that creates clear-cut contrasts between intense lights and shadows. The final result is not as entrancing as Washington's performance, which makes up for the many holes and improbable moments in the narrative by giving a magnetic personality to the wayfarer Eli.

The plot presents some similarities with *The Road* (2009), the film based on Cormack McCarthy's 2006 novel of the same name. Indeed, *The Book of Eli* also narrates a journey towards the sea in the aftermath of a

nuclear blast. In addition, in both films, the road across America seems to be the privileged trope from which to observe the usual wasteland and the end of civilization.

However, while in *The Road* the Earth is turned into a grey, cold, and rainy place, the scenery of *The Book of Eli* is reminiscent of the *Mad Max* movie series and is characterized by scorching light and desertified, dry land.

Similarly to the anarchic society of *Mad Max*, America no longer has a ruling class and human activities are self-organized, which means that people are either criminals or hapless souls subjected to any kind of crime, from rape, to slavery, from theft, to homicide, etc. The landscape has been left unchanged from the post-war wreckage, and not even basic infrastructures have been rebuilt. Water and energy are a luxury, cannibalism often a necessity, and the vast majority of the population is illiterate as a consequence of the unfortunate shortage of printed words.

Pushed by a voice, Eli has been traveling alone for thirty years. The voice told him that, once he reached the West, a new civilization would be able to flourish thanks to the book he carries with him. On his way westward, he stops in a ghost town to get water and provisions. Carnegie (Gary Oldman), the literate and thus self-appointed tyrant of the community, is looking for the book Eli has, for it is a powerful tool to control people's conscience. When he sends his henchmen out on their criminal routine, he always hopes, to no avail, that they will come back with it. When we find out that Eli's book is, of course, a King James Bible, we understand that Eli and Carnegie embody the conflict between true and false Christian prophets. The former travels to spread the magnanimous Word of God—which according to the Hughes brothers is compatible with manslaughter, but only on the very American grounds of self-protection—and the latter would like to use it for evil ends.

Carnegie confronts Eli in order to get the bible, and in the fight, during which Eli shows an extraordinary physical prowess, they both end up heavily injured. Nonetheless, Carnegie prevails and obtains the precious Bible, while Eli, impaired but determined, accomplishes his mission with the help of Solara (Mila Kunis), the daughter of Carnegie's blind mistress/slave, and he finally reaches Alcatraz.

Even though the film ends with a couple of unexpected twists, the plot is simple, predictable, and annoyingly self-righteous in its collocation of the King James Version at the heart of a new social order. One would expect that with the chance of a total makeover of human civilization, there could have been different cultural paradigms than the ones that guided Western society for millennia.

I recommend watching the movie with Octavia Butler's novel *The Parable of the Sower* (1993) in mind, for Butler's wise and no-nonsense vision of the future gains much in the comparison. Considering the similarities between the two stories—which, by the way, amounts to a couple of details, the trip towards the Bay Area, and a Black protagonist—Butler's apocalyptic fiction provides a view of the cultural function of religion that has nothing to do with the one devised by Albert and Allen Hughes and scriptwriter Gary Whitta. Butler's message is that we need different values in a world in continuous flux. So, the protagonist of her book, Lauren Olamina, rejects the sacred Christian text as the only viable means to circulate moral values. Butler shows us how Olamina's unorthodox religion, based on the concept of continual change and adaptation, is in the end successful in creating a different type of civilization, one that brings together people of different cultural backgrounds, and locks them in a relationship founded on mutual support, respect, and love. ∎

3% [TV series]

Alfredo Suppia

3%. Dir. Daina Giannecchini, Dani Libardi and Jotagá Crema. Maria Bonita Filmes. 2011.

3% IS A BRAZILIAN SF TV SERIES produced by Maria Bonita Filmes and directed by Daina Giannecchini, Dani Libardi and Jotagá Crema. With support from FICTV/Mais Cultura, the pilot program (27 min.) of the series has been produced and, in order to attract further investment for future TV broadcasting, has now been made available on YouTube with English subtitles (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R_rvS7nX7pM).

Thus far, *3%* has won the first stage of FicTV/Mais Cultura—a competition sponsored by the Brazilian Ministry of Culture which seeks to stimulate the development and production of innovative dramas for public TV—as well as Best Fiction Series in the 2010 Competitive Exhibition of Brazilian TV Pilots and the International Television Festival.

According to Jotagá Crema, one of the directors, the first season of *3%* has already been written: "we are spreading the pilot over the Internet in hopes of getting a TV station interested in broadcasting the series." Detailed information about *3%* can be found on Facebook

at http://www.facebook.com/3porcento.

The series *3%* is set in a "grey" near future. In this dystopian reality, people live divided into two very different societies where access to the more developed "nation," or "That Side," is strictly regulated. "That Side" is the dreamland for young people who wish to escape their current conditions. In order to make it to "That Side," these individuals must undergo a harsh selection process. After performing the series of bizarre and seemingly nonsensical tests, only *3%* of the candidates who enter into the selection process are granted approval to immigrate to "That Side." For the other 97%, failure to pass the various stages of the selection process can mean not only losing the opportunity to emigrate forever, but also possibly death. Needless to say, the world presented in *3%* clearly mirrors real-life scenarios such as those related to the Mexican-American border disputes or the socio-historical context presented by the formerly divided Germany.

The first episode unfolds from the viewpoint of one young candidate, whose voice initially instructs the viewer about the peculiarities of her world. By the end of the pilot episode, however, this "preliminary protagonist" is gone. It is her story which introduces the "true" main characters: a young man who cheats in order to qualify for the selection process, a determined boy confined to a wheelchair, and a seemingly naïve girl.

The future of these characters, however, is dependent on the producers' success in securing funds to continue the series.

3% portrays a futuristic dystopia that echoes George Orwell's *1984* (1948) and Evgueny Zamiatin's *We* (1932), with a hint of puzzle film and American TV series like the worldwide famous *Lost*. The plot's main weakness or lack of originality is offset by its promise of providing a typically Brazilian and contemporary interpretation of such an SF dystopia. The pilot also seems to demonstrate that the show not only intends to deal with a long tradition in science fiction (the clash between an individual and the totalitarian technocratic state), but also weave a curious allegory about the ghost of bureaucracy that plagues Brazilian society since colonial times.

The sets in *3%* are mostly gray, nearly "monochromatic." The costumes worn by the immigration candidates make them resemble the workers in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927)—mechanized individuals with no identity, solely "numbers" dressed in minimalist and standardized uniforms. *3%* relies on the minimalism of its sets, costumes, dialogue/screenplay, and the intimacy of its mise-en-scène. As a whole, this first episode

also alludes to Kafka's oeuvre, a tropical variation of the Austrian-Hungarian bureaucratic inferno depicted by the author in *The Process* and *In the Penal Colony*. Occasionally, *3%* recalls the nonsense, "absurdism" and "pure action in itself" of SF thrillers such as Vincenzo Natali's *Cube* (1997) and its sequels, as well as a much more sophisticated cult movie, Hugo Santiago's *Invasión* (1969), scripted by Jorge Luis Borges and Adolfo Bioy Casares. But overall, the pilot heralds the possibility for a genuine and viable Brazilian science fiction series that does not have to rely on sophisticated special effects that have come to characterize American blockbuster films. Accordingly, *3%* seems to corroborate my thesis that a "third way" of Brazilian science fiction is still possible—an alternative to the "first" way (the big-budget movie, with plenty of technological resources) and the "second" way (the B-movie or, by extension, trash film). Fueled by suspense, *3%* invests in a more intimate and minimal *mise-en-scène*, circumscribed to enclosed spaces, while the action in the series is organically based on dialogue, to some extent in the way of David Mamet's films.

Shot with Red One cameras capable of rendering 4K resolution (approximately 8 million pixels), *3%* is very parsimonious with the importance it places on long shots with a great depth of field, privileging close-ups instead—an understandable option for a modest production that address the fantastic. ■

Announcements

Call for Papers- Conference

Title: SFRA 2012 Conference - Urban Apocalypse, Urban Renaissance: Science Fiction and Fantasy Landscapes

Deadline: 23 April 2012

Conference Date: 28 June 2012 - 1 July 2012

Contact: sdberman1121@gmail.com

Topic: Detroit is at once an apocalyptic city and a Renaissance city. Over the past ten years, Detroit has suffered immensely, especially during the economic downturn and the virtual demise of the auto industry. Its apocalyptic landscape of abandoned buildings, its negative image due to high crime rates, a recently impeached corrupt Mayor, Kwame Kilpartick, and the loss of close to 300,000 people in the last census have made it the symbol of a city with a hopeless future. However, there is hope as the so called Renaissance city of the 1970s may now be experiencing a true Renaissance. New ven-

ues for the Detroit Tigers and Detroit Lions, funding obtained by Mayor Bing to raze many of the abandoned buildings, the resurgence of the auto industry along with an invitation to the film industry, and a call for repopulation of Detroit with legal immigrants by New York Mayor Bloomberg may re-establish Detroit as the major city that it could be.

It is an urban landscape of change, revealing the end of one era and the beginning of another–an urban landscape that is ripe for science fiction and fantasy literature. The wide-ranging landscape of Detroit, Michigan is reminiscent of the various landscapes evident in science fiction and fantasy. Thus, Detroit can serve as an inspiration for paper topics considered at this conference. Papers can cover any topic concerning landscapes.

Here are some suggested topics:

- Apocalyptic Landscapes in science fiction and fantasy, as in the novels *Slaughterhouse Five* by Vonnegut, *Dreamsnake* by Vonda McIntyre, or *The Road* by McCarthy
- Renaissance landscapes evident in utopic literature such as More's *Utopia*
- Psychogeography presented in recent novels like Valente's *Palimpsest* or Mieville's *The City and the City*
- Alien Landscapes: from the landscape in Weinbaum's "A Martian Odyssey" to Pohl's Venus in *The Space Merchants* to Le Guin's Gethen in *The Left Hand of Darkness* to Robinson's Mars trilogy to Vinge's *Fire upon the Deep*
- Landscapes created by terraforming
- Set design in SF films, like Syd Mead's set design in *Blade Runner*, based in part on the Detroit skyline of the early 80s
- Virtual landscapes as in the fiction of Greg Egan, William Gibson, Charles Stross, etc. or in films, such as *The Matrix*
- Foreign landscapes as evident in recent novels like Bacigalupi's Thailand in *The Wind-Up Girl*, McDonald's Istanbul in *The Dervish House*, VanderMeer's Ambergris in *Finch*, etc.
- Alternate history landscapes
- U.S. landscapes as in Gaiman's Minnesota in *American Gods* or Doctorow's San Francisco in *Little Brother*
- Ecological landscapes: The effects of pollution or eco-terrorism on landscapes
- Future landscapes as in Banks' *Algebraist*, Stephenson's *Anathem*, or Wilson's *Julian Comstock* or past

landscapes as in Butler's *Kindred*, Willis' *Doomsday Book*, or Clarke's *Jonathan Strange and Mr. Norrell*
- Space or the spaceship as a landscape?
- Gender Landscapes

Non-conference themed papers and panels related to or focusing on science fiction and fantasy are also welcomed!

Submission: Please forward abstracts to sdberman1121@gmail.com by April 23rd, 2012. Presenters must be members of the SFRA. To join, go to sfra.org. Full conference details are available here:

http://sfradetroit2012.com/ ∎

Call for Papers - Conference

Title: "Science-Fiction Myths: Travels through Time and Space" An area of multiple panels for the Film & History Conference on "Film and Myth"
Deadline: June 1, 2012
Conference Date: 26 September 2012- 30 September 2012
Contact: A. Bowdoin Van Riper, Area Chair, bvanriper@bellsouth.net
Topic: Films that depict travel through time and space captivate us with tales of the past, the future, the distant, and the alien. These stories are shaped, however, not just by scientific principles, but by complex mythologies that reflect our collective anxieties. How fragile is "our" history? A seemingly trivial change to the past—a dropped book in *Back to the Future*, an act of kindness in *The Butterfly Effect*—can sweep away the present and replace it with something far worse (or far better). How do the alien forms of distant worlds beckon us (with a new Earth in *Titan A.E.*) or disappoint us (with pale imitations of Earth in *Firefly*) or terrify us (with the upside-down society of *Planet of the Apes*)? How do space- and time-travel myths give shape to our fears—of loving the wrong person, of leaving home forever, of being forgotten, of entering a foreign world? How do these myths give shape to our hopes—that the future is ours to shape, that the universe is full of wonders, that human experience might transcend time and space?

This area, comprising multiple panels, will treat all aspects of the mythological underpinnings of space and time travel in science-fiction films and television programs. Papers that explore how such myths are played out in science fiction from outside the US and UK are

especially welcome. Possible topics include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Nomads: Cold Sleep, Relativity, and the Loneliness of Space Travel
- Generation Spaceships and the Ship-as-World (e.g., *Alien*, *Pandorum*)
- Time Travel and "Fixing History" (e.g., *Quantum Leap*, *12 Monkeys*)
- Love, Sex, and the Time Traveler (e.g., *Back to the Future*, *Somewhere in Time*)
- Who Are You?: Myth and Identity in Space and Time Travel
- Paradoxes in Time Travel: Killing Grandpa, and Other Bad Ideas
- Just Like California: "Alien" Worlds and Space
- Travel as Tourism
- Galactic Empires: Rome with Spaceships?
- The Human(oid) Void: Myths of First Contact (e.g., *Star Trek*, *Babylon 5*)
- Homeward Bound: Myths of the Lost Earth (e.g., *Battlestar Galactica*, *Firefly*, *Wall-E*)
- Wormhole Diplomacy: Bridging Cultural Spaces

Submission: Proposals for complete panels (three related presentations) are also welcome, but they must include an abstract and contact information, including an e-mail address, for each presenter. Please e-mail your 200-word proposal by June 1, 2012: A. Bowdoin Van Riper, Area Chair, 2012 Film & History Conference "Science-Fiction Myths: Travels through Space and Time." Southern Polytechnic State University. Email: bvanriper@bellsouth.net. ▪

Call for Papers - Conference

Title: 2012 Conference of The Northeast Popular Culture/American Culture Association (NEPCA)
Deadline: Proposals by 1 June 2012
Conference Date: 26-27 October 2012,
St. John Fisher College in Rochester, New York
Contact: Popular.Culture.and.the.Middle.Ages @gmail.com
Topic: Proposals are invited from scholars of all levels for papers to be presented in the Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Legend Area. Presentations will be limited to 15-20 minutes in length (depending on final panel size) and may address any aspect of the intermedia genres of science fiction, fantasy, and/or legends as represented in popular culture produced in any country, any time peri-

od, and for any audience. Please see our website (http://sf-fantasy-legend.blogspot.com/) for further details and ideas. CFP Categories include:
- American
- Children's Literature
- Film and Television
- Humanities Computing and the Internet
- Interdisciplinary
- Medieval
- Popular Culture
- Science and Culture
- Theatre
- Twentieth Century and Beyond
- Victorian

Submission: If you are interested in proposing a paper or panel of papers, please send a proposal of approximately 300 to 500 words and a one to two page CV to both the Program Chair AND to the Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Legend Area Chair at the following addresses (please note "SF/Fantasy/Legend Proposal" in your subject line):

Tim Madigan
Program Chair
tmadigan@sjfc.edu

Michael A. Torregrossa
Science Fiction, Fantasy and Legend Area Chair
Popular.Culture.and.the.Middle.Ages@gmail.com

The Northeast Popular Culture/American Culture Association (NEPCA) is a regional affiliate of the American Culture Association and the Popular Culture Association. NEPCA is an association of scholars in New England and New York, organized in 1974 at the University of Rhode Island. We reorganized and incorporated in Boston in 1992. The purpose of this professional association is to encourage and assist research, publication, and teaching on popular culture and culture studies topics by scholars in the northeast region of the United States. By bringing together scholars from various disciplines, both academic and non-academic people, we foster interdisciplinary research and learning. We publish a newsletter twice per year and we hold an annual conference at which we present both the Peter C. Rollins Book Award and an annual prize.

Membership in NEPCA is required for participation. Annual dues are currently $30 for full-time faculty and $15 to all other individuals. Further details are available at http://users.wpi.edu/~jphanlan/NEPCA.html. ▪

Science Fiction Research Association

www.sfra/org

The Science Fiction Research Association is the oldest professional organization for the study of science fiction and fantasy literature and film. Founded in 1970, the SFRA was organized to improve classroom teaching; to encourage and assist scholarship; and to evaluate and publicize new books and magazines dealing with fantastic literature and film, teaching methods and materials, and allied media performances. Among the membership are people from many countries—students, teachers, professors, librar- ians, futurologists, readers, authors, booksellers, editors, publishers, archivists, and scholars in many disciplines. Academic affilia- tion is not a requirement for membership. Visit the SFRA Website at http://www.sfra.org. For a membership application, contact the SFRA Treasurer or see the Website.

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SFRA Standard Membership Benefits

SFRA Review
Four issues per year. This newsletter/journal surveys the field of science fiction scholarship, including extensive reviews of fiction and nonfiction books and media, review articles, and listings of new and forthcoming books. The Review also prints news about SFRA internal affairs, calls for papers, and updates on works in progress.

SFRA Annual Directory
One issue per year. Members' names, contact information, and areas of interest.

SFRA Listserv
Ongoing. The SFRA listserv allows members to discuss topics and news of interest to the SF community, and to query the collective knowledge of the membership. To join the listserv or obtain further information, visit the listserv information page: http://wiz.cath.vt.edu/mailman/listinfo/sfra-l

Extrapolation
Three issues per year. The oldest scholarly journal in the field, with critical, historical, and bibliographical articles, book reviews, letters, occasional special topic issues, and an annual index.

Science Fiction Studies
Three issues per year. This scholarly journal includes critical, historical, and bibliographical articles, review articles, reviews, notes, letters, international coverage, and an annual index.

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Three issues per year. British scholarly journal, with critical, historical, and bibliographical articles, reviews, and letters. Add to dues: $33 seamail; $40 airmail.

The New York Review of Science Fiction
Twelve issues per year. Reviews and features. Add to dues: $28 domestic; $30 domestic institutional; $34 Canada; $40 UK and Europe; $42 Pacific and Australia.

Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts
Four issues per year. Scholarly journal, with critical and bibliographical articles and reviews. Add to dues: $40/1 year; $100/3 years.

Femspec
Critical and creative works. Add to dues: $40 domestic individual; $96 domestic institutional; $50 international individual; $105 international institutional.

Science Fiction Research Association