



some fantastic



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Editorial: Welcome Back!

Here it is, the second issue. In many ways this feels like the true first issue. No knock against the first issue as I was equally proud of getting it out. However, most of it was written nearly a year before its publication, whereas this issue was completely compiled within the past few months. The ratio of movie material to book material is still a little too heavily weighted to DVDs for my taste, but work on improving that continues.

This issue also coincides with the official launch of the *Some Fantastic* website, the address of which you can find in the masthead on this page. There you can find past issues and all sorts of additional information about this publication. Admittedly, it could use a little color, but while designing the site with my limited HTML skills I was solely concerned with functionality and usefulness. In the upcoming months I hope to add some well-placed splashes of color and eye candy to liven its current black & white appearance.

You will also find on the website ways to help financially support *Some Fantastic*. I don't want to have to go into a NPR-style fund drive, but it is distributed without charge. Yes, e-publishing reduces costs greatly, but without getting into a detailed description of all the costs, overhead still exists. So if you have a few extra bucks to spare, please visit the "Support this Magazine" link on our website. If you want a little more bang for your buck, we are selling used books and DVDs, the proceeds of which will fund this endeavor.

This issue features a few new writers, and I hope that many of them will make appearances in future issues. Like many other 'zines in this field, we are constantly looking for writers who are willing to work at the rates we are willing to pay. If you are interested in

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Smith and the Digital Whale: Ahab in *The Matrix*

By Alex Esten

Throughout the course of literary history, there have always been authors who achieve literary greatness and prestige. These authors have influenced countless writers after them. Herman Melville is one such author. His effect on literature is undeniable. One only has to look to Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five* to see what influence Melville's *Billy Budd*, *Sailor* has had. However, Melville's hold on writers is not exclusive to literature, and various characters from Melville's work are so moving and powerful that screenwriters today are still drawing inspiration from them.

The Wachowski brothers, for example, have incorporated Captain Ahab's obsession with retribution, his preoccupation with breaking through boundaries, and his Nihilistic worldview, transforming the whaling captain from the early 1800s into Agent Smith, Neo's callous and compassionless cyber-antagonist in *The Matrix*. Considering that Agent Smith cannot deviate from his quest to destroy Neo, is obsessed with breaking free from his digital prison, and believes that "the purpose of life is to end," it is quite reasonable that Ahab plays a significant part in the character foundation and psychological make-up of Agent Smith.

The obsessions are similar in that they both begin with a significant violation of the physical self. Ahab loses his leg, which he treats as a total dismemberment of his person, and Smith explodes. Ahab views his physical immolation as a transgression of his soul. His missing leg is not simply a missing

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"*Empire* had the better ending: Luke gets his hand cut off, and finds out Vader's his father; Han gets frozen and taken away by Boba Fett... All *Jedi* had was a bunch of Muppets." -Dante, *Clerks*

body part. He has lost part of himself. As his ship is rounding Patagonian Cape in mid winter, he still lays in a hammock as “his torn body and gashed soul [bleed] into one another; and so interfusing, [make] him mad” (Melville, 200.) His crew thinks him lost and are forced to restrain him in a strait-jacket. But as the Cape Horn swells, Ahab appears, “the direful madness” gone, and he is able to issue his calm orders once again and to reassume command. However, this calmness is only the exterior as Ahab’s hidden self raves on. He still “was intent on an audacious, immitigable, and supernatural revenge” (Melville, 202.) He begins hunting the whale, willing to travel to the ends of the Earth for a chance to carry out his vengeance. Ahab’s fury knows no bounds:

“No, ye’ve knocked me down, and I am up again; but ye have run and hidden. Come forth from behind your cotton bags! I have no long gun to reach ye. Come,

Ahab’s compliments to ye; come and see if ye can swerve me. Swerve me? Ye cannot swerve me, else ye swerve yourselves! Man has ye there. Swerve me? The path to my fixed purpose is laid with iron rails, whereon my soul is grooved to run. Over unsounded gorges, through the rifled hearts of mountains, under torrents’ beds, unerringly I rush! Naught’s an obstacle, naught’s an angle to the iron way!” (Melville, 183)

Nothing will stand in Ahab’s way, and his path to revenge cannot be altered. The end, we see, is inevitable. There is nowhere for the whale to hide; nowhere can the whale go that Ahab cannot find it. “Aye, aye! And I’ll chase him round Good Hope, and round the Horn, and round the Norway Maelstrom, and round perdition’s flames before I give him up” (Melville, 177.) Ahab will go through hell itself before he lets the whale escape him. These sentiments are echoed in *The Matrix*, in the Smith/Neo duality.

Neo, the One, is prophesied to free humanity from enslavement under the machines. At this point in the trilogy, Agent Smith has been the principal mechanical entity, so for Neo to fulfill the prophecy, his first step, in a sense, is destroy Agent Smith. Keeping this in mind as we re-read Ahab’s prophesy, we see that Neo destroying Smith (dismembering him, in fact), fulfills the first half of Ahab’s divination. The second half is fulfilled only when the violated get their revenge: “I now prophesy that I will dismember my dismemberer. Now, then, be the prophet and the fulfiller one” (Melville, 183.) Later, in *Reloaded*, Smith reveals the precise implication of his destruction at Neo’s hands in the finale of *The Matrix*:

“And now here I stand because of you, Mister Anderson, because of you I’m no longer an agent of the system, because of you I’ve changed—I’m unplugged—a new man, so to speak, like you, apparently free.”

This freedom gives Smith the power of duplicating himself by copying his code into

Editorial

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working for slave wages and in voicing your opinion on anything related to sf in all its forms, by all means contact us; we’d love to hear from you.

If reviewing isn’t your forte, I am also looking to publish additional critical essays and any other type of writing related to genre film and literature. Furthermore, letters (or emails) of comment (LoC) are happily received, and here at *Some Fantastic*, and I will print and reply to those letters. Contact information is available on the webpage and at the bottom-right of page three.

On a quick note about distribution, although we publish electronically, I do understand that the size of the PDFs make downloading cumbersome for those still using a dial-up internet connection. I will mail print versions of the magazine to those who request it. Again, please check the webpage or the box at the bottom of page three for further information.

Finally, I wanted to explain why I selected the name *Some Fantastic*. While it certainly carries an sf connotation, it also happens to be the name of a song put out by a band that in my opinion is quite possibly the best to ever come out of Canada. But don’t worry, I’ll resist the urge to make them, the Barenaked Ladies, the patron saints of this magazine. It’s enough that they helped supply the name for this endeavor.

— Matthew

another host. He makes sure to fully exploit this ability, converting programs, those humans still trapped within the Matrix, and even those humans who have been freed previously. One particular freed human that he assimilates is a man by the name of Bane. Upon assimilating this human, Smith is then granted a remarkable ability; he is able to jack-out of the Matrix. Smith, using Bane as a host body, is freed from the Matrix. This further illustrates the lengths to which Smith will go to have his revenge. His obsession with Neo is growing, and his dialogue in *Matrix Revolutions* mimics Ahab's theme of "nowhere to run, nowhere to hide." Confronting Neo on the Logos, he says, "There's nowhere I can't go, there's nowhere I won't find you." As he assimilates more and more individuals within the Matrix, his power grows exponentially, to the point of posing as much of a threat to the system's stability as Neo's power does.

These struggles, both between Ahab and the whale and between Smith and Neo, become a matter of balance. Ahab will only be whole again when he has immolated the whale. But in achieving balance, both Ahab and the whale are to die. In a sense, they become one, a unification of opposing powers. This is mirrored in *The Matrix*, as the Smith/Neo duality is based on the need for balance. Upon becoming the One, Neo had become too powerful for the system to function properly. The Matrix becomes unbalanced, and the element of Smith is introduced as a counter to Neo's power. During the final conflict, the Super Burly Brawl of *Matrix Revolutions*, the unification seen in the Ahab/Whale duality is brought into *The Matrix* as Neo allows himself to be absorbed by Smith, allowing himself to be violated, and the two entities become one. This fulfills the prophecy of the One, which foresaw him bringing peace and harmony and thus an end to the conflict, while simultaneously achieving the balance that fulfills the second half of Ahab's prophecy, which strongly emphasizes inevitability.

Throughout the Trilogy, Agent Smith is the voice of this inevitability. He always looks to the end, to the final chapter. The means are simply there to bring him to his purpose, as is first evi-

denced during his fight with Neo in the subway in the original *Matrix*. He hears the horn of an oncoming train, remarking at how it is "the sound of inevitability... the sound of death." If the train's horn is the sound of inevitability, the train becomes death, and the rails then become the path to a fixed purpose, touching back upon Ahab's fixation on his own iron rails.

This obsession with the inevitable end can also be interpreted as a desire to go beyond what is immediate. Both Ahab and Smith demonstrate a desire to meet their end, and often do not hold the immediate present in any high regard, treating it as a barrier that they must break through. Ahab on the Pagan leopards: "Look! See yonder Turkish cheeks of spotted tawn—living, breathing pictures painted by the sun. The Pagan leopards—the unrecking and unworshipping things, that live; and seek, and give no reasons for the torrid life they

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feel" (Melville, 178.) He views the Pagans as without reason for living, without purpose. They live without knowledge of their surroundings and without care for the stifling, suppressive life in which they live. This is the world around Ahab, a world that sickens him so much that he seeks to penetrate and destroy it.

His world is based on superficiality, a mask, "all visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event—in the living act, the undoubted deed—there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask" (Melville, 178.) Here, Ahab could be indicating there is a controlling force behind every man. This force could be the inner push to escape, which he further develops, "how can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall" (Melville, 178.)

As before, Ahab's attitude and tone is mimicked in Smith's action and dialogue, most notably in his tirade to a drugged Morpheus, as he demands the access codes to Zion. If given the access codes, he can then enter the human city, destroy it, and no longer be needed to patrol "this place, this zoo, this prison, this reality, whatever you want to call it." To Smith, the Matrix is a world without purpose, and to live without purpose, there is no reason to exist.

Smith views the Matrix and its inhabitants as Ahab views the Pagan leopards. To Ahab, the Pagan leopards lack comprehension and deeper understanding of the world in which they live. They are blinded, essentially, to the truth that their world is a "torrid life." They do not realize that they are living in hell, and this is similar to those living within the Matrix, unaware of their imprisonment in this digital confine, and wholly "without knowledge of their surroundings and without care for the stifling, suppressive life in which they live." Both the Pagan leopards and those living within the Matrix are living a lie, as it were.



Smith's tirade continues, as he grabs Morpheus' head and violently squeezes, "I can't stand it any longer. It's the smell, if there is such a thing. I feel saturated by it. I can taste your stink. And every time I do I feel I have somehow been infected by it. It's repulsive, isn't it?" He feels violated by the physicality of the world around him and it is this sense of physical violation that drives him even further to break free from this disgusting superficiality.

His disgust with the human form is further developed in *Matrix Revolutions*, during his confrontation with Neo aboard the Logos, "still don't recognize me? I admit it is difficult to think, encased in this rotting piece of meat. The stink of it filling every breath, a suffocating cloud you can't escape," he spits blood, "disgusting! Look at how pathetically fragile it is. Nothing this weak is meant to survive." In this exchange, Smith stresses the importance of breaking through the mask, to see the truth behind it, "Yes... that's it, Mr. Anderson. Look past the flesh, look through the soft gelatin of these dull cow eyes and see your enemy." When Neo fully realizes that "appearances can be deceiving," the fight begins.

It is a brutal one, too. Both Smith and Neo endure heavy damage, but nothing can prepare Neo for Smith grabbing hold of a severed electrical cable and shoving it into his face, blinding him in the process. Neo begins fumbling about, as Smith slowly and deliberately steps away, in and out of the shadows, taunting him, "I wish you could see yourself, Mr. Anderson. The blind messiah. You're a symbol for all of your kind, Mr. Anderson. Helpless, pathetic. Just waiting to be put out of your misery." Smith picks up a pole, preparing to connect it with Neo's fragile, human head. He swings but hits nothing, as Neo ducks and counters. "I can see you," Neo says. Neo's physical blindness has allowed him a second sight, giving him the ability to see Smith's true form: hellfire, the basis of which can be found in Ahab's address to the flames in Chapter 119, which reads:

"Oh, thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on these seas I as Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act so burned by thee, that to this hour I bear the scar; I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance...I own thy speechless, placeless power; but to the last gasp of my earthquake life will dispute its unconditional, unintegral mastery in me...Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true child of fire, I breathe it back to thee." (Melville, 550)

In this passage, Ahab indicates he once worshipped the flames, but then was scarred and now believes the only way to honor the flame is through defiance. This passion is what drives him; the fiery anger within him gives him purpose. The "scar" he speaks of can be interpreted as his physical violation at the "hands" of the whale. His philosophy of honoring the flame (his destruction) through defiance (fighting it) supports this reading. Smith's history with Neo closely follows this reading.

When Smith is interrogating Neo in the first film, he produces a rather thick folder that appears to cover Neo's entire life. "As you can see, we've been keeping our eyes on you for some time now, Mr. Anderson," Smith says. Based upon this extensive knowledge of Neo's life, Smith's interest in Neo, and with the understanding that Neo does become the One, the savior of mankind and someone that is worshipped by the humans, as evidenced in *The Matrix Reloaded* when Neo and Trinity step out of the elevator and are met with the masses bowing down to Neo, it is safe to say that Smith does in fact worship Neo. In the Finale of the first film, Neo destroys Smith, and Smith bears the scar of it throughout the remainder of the trilogy.

Further drawing on Ahab's speech to the flames, specifically the passage regarding the "speechless, placeless power," Smith is granted powers similar to Neo's after he is destroyed. Both Smith and Neo are both more or less unable to appropriately explain the source and reasons behind their powers, especially Smith, as his dialogue in *Reloaded* illustrates, "Our connection. I don't fully understand how it happened." This precisely ad-

heres to the definition of "speechless" found in the Oxford English Dictionary: "incapable of expression in or by speech." Furthermore, Smith's powers and the powers of the One are considered "out of place" within the confines of the Matrix, which makes the One essentially a god amid the mortal masses, and those powers and abilities transcend those of the "average" man. When compared against the OED definition, Smith's power becomes "placeless," as it is "not confined to place; not local; not bounded or defined."

In this sense, Ahab's mention of the replication of power takes on a literal meaning in *The Matrix*. Also, Smith thinks of himself as an exception to the rules, as an independent force that cannot be controlled, and adheres to Ahab's rejection of the external control. This is in direct violation of what is expected in the Matrix, and is another example of Smith breaking through boundaries.

The defiance of the creator is also a technique of asserting one's place in the world. In *Moby Dick*, the creator is a father figure ("but thou art my fiery father," Melville, 551), and the dominating masculine sexuality inherent in the presence and name of *Moby Dick* suggests that Ahab is a child rebelling against the father figure. "Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true child of fire, I breathe it back to thee" supports this interpretation. In realizing that Ahab's essence is that of a fiery child, breathing flame (violence) back to his creator, we see a stunning similarity between the two works in the Smith/Neo duality.

Smith is only freed when Neo penetrates him. Smith's previous form, an Agent, is destroyed and he is reborn in Neo's image. He develops similar powers and abilities, and takes on the social isolation and alienation associated with the personality of the One. However, he seeks to destroy Neo, his father figure, and thus echoes Ahab's rebellious son. In his hellfire form, Smith also embodies the literal meaning of "true child of fire," and does breathe Neo's fire back to him in *Matrix Revolutions*. Through his defiance of his creator, Smith again demonstrates his desire to break free from the level of control inherent in the Matrix, and thus breaking the mask of the Matrix, as Morpheus explains, "[The Matrix] is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind

you from the truth." But what is beyond the mask? What will Ahab and Smith find when they strike through?

This is best answered in terms of Nihilism. Simply put, Nihilism is the belief in "the truth that ultimately Nothingness prevails and the world is meaningless" (Thielicke, 27.) To the Nihilist, there is no center; there is no grounding to life. Everything exists to end, and there is no meaning. Ahab's Nihilistic influences can be seen in his speech about striking through the mask. He sometimes feels that there is nothing beyond the wall, that there is nothing to live for after achieving his goal. But if there is nothing beyond the wall, this is enough to motivate him, as he is concerned with the end, and nothing more. He welcomes the inevitable death, the inevitable Nothingness. His resolution is Nothingness.

He demonstrates the Nihilistic worldview further in his cabin, "This lovely light, it lights not me; all loveliness is anguish to me, since I can ne'er enjoy. Gifted with the high perception, I lack the low, enjoying power; damned, most subtly and most malignantly! Damned in the midst of Paradise! Good night—good night" (Melville 182.) Here Ahab doubts love and sees the emptiness in it. He is unable to enjoy love, savor it, because he cannot believe in it.

Smith echoes this same view of love in the finale of *Matrix Revolutions*:

"Why, Mr. Anderson, why? Why, why do you do it? Why, why get up? Why keep fighting? Do you believe you're fighting for something, for more than your survival? Can you tell me what it is, do you even know? Is it freedom or truth, perhaps peace - could it be for love? Illusions, Mr. Anderson, vagaries of perception. Temporary constructs of a feeble human intellect trying desperately to justify an existence that is without meaning or purpose. And all of them as artificial as the Matrix itself. Although, only a human mind could invent something as insipid as love. You must be able to see it, Mr. Anderson; you must know it by now! You can't win. It's pointless to keep fighting!

Why, Mr. Anderson, why, why do you persist?"

Smith's comments on freedom, truth, peace and love, "Illusions...vagaries of human perception. Temporary constructs of a feeble human intellect trying desperately to justify an existence that is without meaning or purpose," echo the very definition of the Nihilist worldview. He no longer believes in freedom, truth, love, etc. He sees them as meaningless attempts at justification and as holding no real bearing on the end.

The Nihilist would say this: "...these fixed ideas [love, truth, etc] rest upon lies of expedience. The inventors of the lies do not believe in them; they have been invented as productive illusions by means of which to realize a definite purpose. In fact, therefore, there is nothing behind them but Nothingness" (Thielicke, 34.)

Ahab and Smith do not see meaning in their respective worlds. They view them as empty shells without purpose, as prisons that do not fulfill the purpose of life. As they embrace Nihilism, the purpose of life becomes clear to them. As Agent Smith says, "The purpose of life is to end."

These recurrent themes of Nihilism, the desire to escape, and the obsessive quest all indicate that Captain Ahab played a significant part in the characterization and design of Agent Smith. The Wachowski brothers are known for having done exhaustive research and planning for each of their characters in *The Matrix*, and based upon what we have seen concerning Captain Ahab and Agent Smith, it is very likely that they looked to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* for particular aspects of Smith's character.

With the success of *The Matrix Trilogy*, and the wild fascination with the character of Agent Smith, it would prove useful to show students how these two works are connected. Popular cinema is a tool that is vastly underutilized in the field of education. Considering that *Moby Dick* is a difficult novel to grasp and requires a level of attention and comprehension that some students do not possess, using *The Matrix Trilogy* as a reference point or supplementary material will greatly benefit the students in gaining a better understanding of particular themes in *Moby Dick*. Melville's style and layered writing

is daunting, and though some feel that is a positive, there are students who are turned off by it and are less inclined to explore the meanings contained within it.

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George W. Bush, the Far Right, 1984 and *The Forever War*

By Matthew Appleton

Forgive me folks, for I'm about to get incredibly political. Those who know me understand all too well that I am a solid liberal and that I lack patience for those who robotically spout out the talking points of the far-right wing of conservatism. Predictably, I also intensely disdain the Bush administration for a variety of evils, one of which being the fact they consistently remind me of the Inner Party in George Orwell's *1984*.

With the reelection of George W. Bush for a second term, it doesn't appear that I'll stop seeing parallels anytime soon. The attacks on individual rights and liberties in the name of "the war on terror" won't stop; Bush stated throughout the campaign his desire to see the Patriot Act renewed in its entirety, and a Republican-controlled Congress will most likely grant his wish. Neither will the administration's penchant for secrecy nor its refusal to accept information that contradicts its presuppositions. We can certainly expect to see more of the same in regards to refusing to take responsibility for what happened at Abu Ghraib. If you live in what one Bush aide sneeringly and dismissively called "the reality-based community,"¹ the prospect of contemplating the next four years, must seem daunting.

It's almost a knee-jerk reaction to start calling any form of overreaching government oversight "Orwellian," but the Bush administration has really turned it into an art form—so much so that I

recently pulled my copy off the shelves and reread it for the first time in nearly a decade. I had to see for myself whether my memory was just playing tricks on me or Orwell's classic is readily applicable to Bush and the fanatical wing of the Republican Party.

"Applicable" doesn't do the comparison justice.

When I was in grade school, *1984* was taught first and foremost as an anti-Communist novel. However, as anyone outside the United States can tell you, the book is really two other things: a book about language (Orwell incorporates many concepts from his famous "Politics and the English Language" essay into *1984*.) and an anti-authoritarian novel. If there's one word you can use to describe Bush's administration, it's authoritarian.

The most obvious authoritarian figure in the Bush administration is his Attorney General, John Ashcroft. After the attacks of 9/11, he was one of the driving forces behind The Patriot Act, which gave unprecedented powers to the U.S. government in regards to collecting information and spying on American citizens. Not content with these new law enforcement tools, Ashcroft proposed Operation TIPS (Terrorism Information and Prevention System,) a program designed to make every American a potential tipster to authorities. Thankfully, it wasn't implemented and parents could rest peacefully knowing that unlike poor Tom Parsons their children (or neighbors) couldn't

turn them in for thought crimes. Still, it raised the uneasy thought of Americans turning in other Americans for “unpatriotic” acts. Regardless, the Patriot Act is still fully in place and the shadow of Big Brother continues to loom.

Sadly, the resignation of Ashcroft probably doesn’t mean the end of such heavy-handed political maneuvering. Bush’s choice to replace him, White House lawyer Alberto Gonzalez, was the man who authored the memo that stated that the war on terrorism “renders obsolete Geneva’s strict limitations on questioning of enemy prisoners and renders quaint some of its provisions.”² We can surely expect more ideas such as TIPS from the man who suggested that U.S. no longer needed to heed the Geneva Conventions.

But the Bush administration is not the only American political construct eerily paralleled in Orwell’s work. It’s hard not to think of religious conservatives, arguably the base of the Republican Party over the past few years, when reading the following passage out of the fictitious book within *1984*, Emmanuel Goldstein’s anti-Big Brother tome *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*:

“The splitting of the intelligence which the Party requires of its members, and which is more easily achieved in an atmosphere of war, is now almost universal, but the higher up the ranks one goes, the more marked it becomes. It is precisely in the Inner Party that war hysteria and hatred of the enemy are strongest. In his capacity as an administrator, it is often necessary for a member of the Inner Party to know that this or that item of war news is untruthful, and he may often be aware that the entire war is spurious and is either not happening or is being waged for purposes quite other than the declared ones: but such knowledge is easily neutralized by the technique of *doublethink*.” (Orwell, 268)³

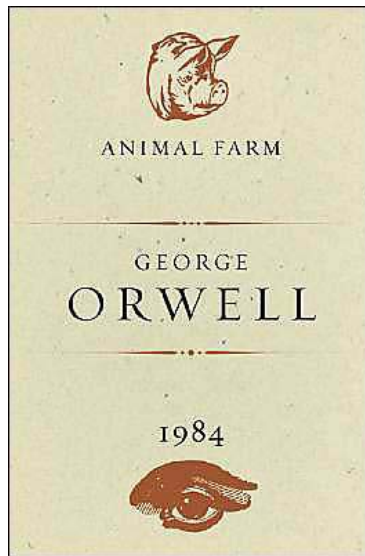
True, you can take this passage and use it to describe the faithful loyalists to any political party or movement, but all I could think about when reading this passage is how much this sounds like the crowd that make up the regular posters on The Free Republic message boards. What really made it so representative of conservative thought in particular is the way that anyone who opposes the American presence in Iraq suddenly becomes the

enemy as well. All throughout the war, anyone—especially public figures—who questioned President Bush and the policy in Iraq was tarred with epithets such as “traitor” and told that they were giving “aid and comfort to the enemy.” No amount of factual evidence could convince supporters that they might be wrong. Thankfully, such patriots never got the opportunity to use Operation TIPS and report the traitors to the authorities.

Another aspect of *1984* that took on a notable prescience during the Bush administration is Winston

Smith’s job: the scrubbing, sanitizing and rewriting of the past. While the Internet has become a treasure trove of information for many, it sadly is an easily manipulated medium. Often, the only way you can prove someone has edited a site is via cached versions of the page or screenshots taken by yourself or others. During 2003 the Bush administration engaged in this sort of historical revisionism by editing any White House press released regarding Iraq. They then made it as difficult as possible for visitors to the pages to find out about the edits by ensuring search engines couldn’t archive pages going forward.⁴

Later, towards the end of the 2004 Presidential campaign, the White House repeated its attempts to revise, or at least remove, unwelcome reminders of the past. In particular, numerous potentially embarrassing audio and video clips were removed from the official White House website.⁵ Additionally, a potentially embarrassing map on the State Department website which showed Iraq did not harbor an active al Qaeda presence prior to September 11 also disappeared.⁶ True, the wide vari-



ety of media available today means that no one, including the White House, can control the past, but the Bush administration certainly made sure that no one could use government resources to find self-incriminating information.

The idea to turn to Joe Haldeman's *The Forever War* came from Locus Online. Recently, it posted a discussion that John Shirley had with six prominent science fiction authors regarding the future.⁷

One of those questions was "Will there always be war? Is it becoming like Haldeman's *The Forever War*? What are the trends in war?" While the responses were interesting, I think that Shirley and the respondents missed two more interesting aspects of the book: the deception used to encourage the masses to support a war and the lasting affects that a prolonged military engagement has on the society it is trying to defend.

For those who are not familiar with the novel, the main character, William Mandella, undergoes the dehumanizing process that is military training and then sees the changes wrought upon human civilization over a centuries-long conflict waged with an alien species called the Taurans. In the process of fighting this war, a war of choice, the human race as a whole finds itself irrevocably changed.

While *The Forever War* came in part from Haldeman's experience as a soldier in the Vietnam War, the fact that it seems to echo many of the present day issues surrounding the war in Iraq says a lot about the timelessness of the novel, as well as the scary parallels between the two wars. The most easily discerned parallel concerns the rationale for the war. We don't know this until the final chapter of *The Forever War*, but it turns out that humankind started the hostilities based "on false pretenses" (Haldeman, 199.)⁸ We also discover:

"You couldn't blame it all on the military, though. The evidence they presented for the Taurans' having been responsible

for the earlier casualties was laughably thin. The few people who pointed this out were ignored.

"The fact was, Earth's economy needed a war, and this one was ideal." (Haldeman, 200)

This is surely reminiscent of an administration whose stated reasons for going to war with Iraq frequently changed and who went to war without solid evidence backing up the need to attack.

But this isn't the only time information is twisted for military purposes. Early in *Forever War*, a soldier is killed when the platoon attacks a lifeform (not Tauran) native to the planet they're on, even though the lifeform shows no sign of hostility toward them. However, when the platoon finally engages the enemy, their Sergeant reminds them, "[The Taurans] are responsible for the lives of your comrades who died in training, and for Ho" (Haldeman, 50.) By this logic, the Taurans are responsible for *every*

death in the military since the beginning of the war.

In addition to the various types of lying used to justify the war and keep the troops motivated, the aspect of *The Forever War* that concerns the transformation of society also contains much relevance. In particular, just how has America changed as a result of the endless war on terrorism?

When the peace treaty is signed we realize just how much like the alien enemy humankind had become. During the course of the war, humankind eventually stopped natural reproduction, just started cloning itself and developed a hive mind that completely did away with individuality. It turns out that is exactly the way the Tauran species had existed in the millennia before its contact with humankind. In other words, humankind became that from which it was trying to defend itself. In light of this, is America remaining America?

The current prognosis, at least from my perspective, isn't good. Take a look at the afore-



mentioned Patriot Act, which eats away at the liberties many Americans take for granted. Then there was the reaction from the American right concerning the Abu Ghraib prison scandal. You had Rush Limbaugh comparing the actions of U.S. troops to nothing worse than “an out-of-control fraternity prank”⁹ and Pat Boone on conservative website NewsMax.com blaming news organizations for the negative publicity surrounding the scandal.¹⁰ This blame-the-press mentality reasserted itself in November when a Marine killed an unarmed Iraqi prisoner of war.¹¹ Forget that the perpetrators of the abuse were really to blame, and never mind that as the champions of human rights and as signers to the Geneva Conventions (remember Alberto Gonzalez’s memo,) the U. S. had a moral obligation to take the high ground in the treatment of prisoners of war.

But isn’t the whole point of defending your society making sure that you don’t debase the elements that make your society unique and worth defending? If you claim your enemy hates you because of the freedoms and rights you claim to honor, shouldn’t you do everything you can to uphold them? Justifying horrific acts by saying the enemy is even more immoral only serves to debase your own society’s higher principals. In doing so, the defenders of the Bush administration over the Abu Ghraib scandal grant the terrorists a victory because American society is changed for the worse. If we’re not careful, at the end of the war we may find that we have transformed into our enemies.

This is the type of thing Haldeman is warning against at the end of *The Forever War*. Between that and Orwell’s *1984*, we get a prophetic look at some of the challenges facing America after four years of the Bush presidency. Hopefully, we will find a way to overcome and survive four more years of his administration.

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DVD Review: *Big Fish*

By Caroline-Isabelle Caron

In *Big Fish*, Tim Burton masterfully brings to life John August's delightfully tortuous plot, adapted from the eponymous collection of short stories by Daniel Wallace. However, this movie is deceiving. It seems to be about the life of a dying Alabama man, but it is really about his son. It seems to have a happy ending, but on second thought, it does not. It even looks like a genre movie, but, really, it is a mainstream movie; just not an American mainstream movie.

At the heart of *Big Fish* are the questions of personal identity and the difficulties of father and son to relate as grown men. It is about the stories we tell of our lives and the lies we tell ourselves. *Big Fish* is the simple, very human story of William Bloom (Billy Crudup), a son attempting to reconcile with his dying father Edward (Albert Finney) during his last few days. Between the two stands an immeasurable edifice made of the dozens of magnificent and colorful tall tales told by Ed about his past, none of which William believes anymore. The movie opens with a younger Ed (Ewan McGregor) telling his young son the "true" story of what happened on the night he was born.

Yet the adult William no longer possesses the imagination and the generosity of heart necessary to believe his father's legendary tales. Adult William is a bland and taciturn man. He has not spoken with his father since his wedding three years prior, when the larger-than-life Ed stole the show by telling the moving tale of how, on the day of William's birth, he had finally caught the 'Big Fish', the smartest catfish in Alabama, and learned a valuable lesson: "When you find a wonderful woman, the best way to catch her is to offer her a wedding ring." William had not, then, understood

the true moral of his father's story: the one you love is the greatest treasure.

As a child, he had wholeheartedly believed his father's stories. Early in the movie, we see him eagerly asking to be told the scary tale of how Ed had met the village witch (Helena Bonham Carter.) As he reached adulthood, however, William came to think that his father had lied to him, and was profoundly hurt and disappointed by the realization. So, when Ed spoke at his wedding, William became blinded by his anger toward Ed for repeating what he thought were falsehoods. After all, Ed had been away selling products door to door on the day of his son's birth. So William had moved (run?) away to Paris with his new bride (a demure Marion Cotillard.) Under Ed's grandiloquence, William had grown bitter and angry, apparently at his father, but really at himself, for not being able to live up to his father's stories, for not having such stories of his own.

Convinced by his mother (Jessica Lange, as always excellent) and his very pregnant wife, he returns home to his father's deathbed. William is torn yet desperate to reconcile with Ed before it is too late. At the heart of the movie's plot, therefore, is William's search for the truth behind his father's stories. It is, ultimately, the only way he knows how to come to terms with Ed's life, by trying to find how much of the tales was factual, what facts would make them real to him. So we follow William through his father's stories, made real for us by Philippe Rousselot's gorgeous photography. William looks through documents, travels to the places his father has been, while we see the devotion and quiet joy of his mother for her beloved. Whenever Jessica Lange is on the screen, her strength and emotion



DVD Release Date: April, 2004
Starring: Ewan McGregor, Albert Finney, Billy Crudup, & Jessica Lange
Director: Tim Burton
Screenplay by: John August
Rated: PG-13
Studio: Columbia Tristar
Special Features: Commentary by Tim Burton; four "filmmaker" featurettes; three "character" featurettes; deleted scenes; widescreen format.

burn with truth. Yet, like in his life, it is Ed's stories that steal the show; they make up most of the movie.

Tim Burton takes us to the oneiric world of the tales Ed crafted. We see him propose to his wife in a field of yellow flowers and meet the conjoined twin singers who helped him while he was trapped in Communist China. We visit the town of Spectre, where the grass is the greenest, the apple pie is the tastiest, and you never want to leave (a nod to the Lotus Eaters, perhaps.) We learn to love the friendly giant with whom he travels and the circus performers who welcome them both.

Burton intersperses these stories with William

On *Harry Potter*

I'm a little late in getting around to reading the Harry Potter books. What started as lack of interest turned into a protest over *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* winning the Hugo Award for novel of the year. However, the movies eroded my resistance, and during the middle of the summer I broke down and proceeded to read all five—one right after the other.

While going through the books, I made a couple brief observations. The first occurred while reading *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (ironically, I haven't seen the movie, yet.) Are the goblins at Gringotts completely oblivious to the world outside the bank? Well-known felon and escapee Sirius Black essentially wires funds from his own account (which isn't frozen for some reason) to the broomstick shop in order to mail Harry a new broomstick, and this doesn't raise any alarms at the bank? Wow.

I absolutely loved it in *Goblet of Fire* when the seats at the top of the stadium where the Quidditch World Cup is held are described as, "Prime seats!" Having attended more than my fair share of games in the "nose-bleed section" at Philadelphia's dearly departed Veterans Stadium, it's nice to think of those seats as a great place to watch a sporting event from... even if that's only the case in fantasy.

Finally, in The Teaching Company's *Science Fiction: The Literature of the Technological Imagination* course (review on page 15,) Eric Rabkin discusses Edgar Allan Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar." As I recently finished all five books in the Harry Potter series in succession, I couldn't help but wonder if J. K. Rowling engaged in some sort of literary reference when she named Voldemort. After all, this is a wizard who was essentially cheating death and extending his own life through unnatural means. Maybe a *Potter*-phile can clear this one up for me as I'm feeling lazy about researching this myself.

— Matthew

slowly coming to terms with the grandiose character his father remains, even when diminished by cancer. Both in plot and especially in mise-en-scène, Burton reminds his audience of previous moviemakers, mostly French and Italian, by using very common European cinematic devices in order to bring this imagined world to life. References are numerous, from a quick nod to Eastwood's *Unforgiven* to more elaborate winks to modern fairy-tales such as *Wizard of Oz*. Audiences more familiar with French cinema might see echoes of *Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain*.

The most visually obvious reference is to Federico Fellini. The maestro is ever present in the movie's color scheme and in the clowns and creatures working for the Calloway Circus, under its mysterious ringmaster Amos Calloway (Danny DeVito.) Nevertheless, this movie is pure Burton. The Hand-o-matics young Ed sells door to door are contraptions right out of *Edward Scissorhands*. In Burton's world, the monsters are nicer than they appear; the apparently normal people are the ones of whom we should be scared. And, as always, there is a moral to every story.

The imagined world of Ed Bloom's is about emotions, myths, and dreams and about what the world means rather than just the bare facts. Each tale revolves around an important lesson Ed learned in life and eagerly tried to pass on to whoever would listen. Beyond simple, straight factuality is truth. Unfortunately, this is a lesson that William will never learn. This is why *Big Fish* closes in a tragedy masquerading as a happy ending. In the last moments of his father's life, William recognizes that since Ed lived in tall tales, he needs a tall tale to see him through his last moments. William tries and succeeds in recapitulating his father's life in the best tale he can. It is funny and moving, quirky and bubbling. Ed passes away convinced that his son has finally understood him. But this is not the case.

In those last moments, William reconciles with his father in a grandiose way. We should feel wonderful. The final sequence should strengthen that feeling, but does not. This last tall tale is no epiphany for William, nor is it transformative. William does not learn the value of storytelling and myth making. At Ed's funeral, William gets to

meet the people behind his father's stories, the giant, the twins, Mr. Calloway, and in that moment, William finally believes. And there lies the tragedy: it is only when faced with the very actors of what he thought was make-believe that he can completely accept Ed's tall tales. He never lets go of his matter-of-fact, literal outlook on the world. He does not learn to dream.

The DVD's special features are as lusciously designed and as deceiving as the movie itself. The menus are gorgeous, recalling the circus theme. There are abundant behind-the-scenes shorts, exploring the film's major themes and principal characters. The "Filmmakers' Path" presents four shorts centering on Burton's take on the story, comparing it to John August's, and exploring the importance of myths in our lives. They are delightful and insightful. They are, nevertheless, "obligatory" features with little innovation.

The DVD includes a short about the animatronics used in the film (jumping spiders!), a couple of easter eggs, a Tim Burton trivia quiz (easy for avid fans) and an audio commentary track. The

latter is as entertaining as Burton can be: he is witty, deep, and dark. Burton looks at the world and his films in his renowned off-kilter way, which makes what he has to say fascinating. However, as such, this audio commentary is of the worse, most annoying kind. Rather than being thoughts and remarks about each scene as we are watching, it is a two-hour-long conversation over the movie. Comments about scenes, however riveting, don't always coincide with them, but rather precede or follow them. I did listen to the whole thing, but not in one sitting because of the frustration it. Better to enjoy the movie without it. Sit back in a comfortable couch with your beloved and a warm blanket, and suspend your disbelief. Ed's stories are real, and in every Alabama lake, there is a really big fish waiting to be caught.

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

DVD Review: *Paycheck*

By Dan Franzen

This filming of Philip K. Dick's eponymous short story isn't too bad, but it suffers from some miscasting and overall sloppy screenwriting. But overall it's really not that bad. And hey, when you're talking about a John Woo action movie, who wants to quibble about such nuances as plot? Bah, you're here for the explosions, admit it.

Michael Jennings (Ben Affleck) is a super-duper top-secret scientist who steals the work of others and improves it – then has his memory of the work erased completely. Works out pretty nice for him, too, as he's well compensated for his scientific efforts. He accepts a job from old friend Jimmy Rethrick (Aaron Eckhart), who's head of one of those typical cutting edge tech companies that's working on the Next Big Thing. Jimmy's project will entail three years of Michael's memory being erased. Michael agrees to it, especially after meeting lovely scientist Rachel Porter (Uma Thurman), a biologist with Rethrick's company.

But after Michael wakes up from his memory zapping, odd things happen. First, when he visits his bank account to withdraw his massive paycheck (in the form of company stocks), he's told he forfeited it. Instead, in his safety deposit box Michael finds various personal items that he'd surrendered when he entered the company to do his work. And nothing else.

Questions abound for the engineer. Why would he forfeit his stocks? Why would he have these seemingly innocuous objects? Is something bad afoot?

Paycheck is perhaps a little more cerebral than the typical John Woo movie, but be warned: Do not overthink things. There are plot holes through which you could leap tethered to a tank. On the other hand, there's a mystery to solve, so use caution lest a brain is sprained.

The first real problem is that Affleck is no action hero. Heck, I can't even see him as a scientist.

He just seems too shallow, too vague for the role, wearing only one of two expressions, neither of them convincing. To top it off (literally), Affleck wears perhaps the dorkiest haircut in history. (Although he should take comfort in the fact that Eckhart's is almost as dorky.) Affleck looks silly trying to figure things out; you can almost see the hamster running around his wheel in Ben's brain as he tries to connect plot element A to plot element B. It's not a pretty sight.

A second problem is that Affleck's hero is really an amoral jerk, at least at the beginning. After all, he's stealing the work of other people. But compared with the really Bad Guys, he doesn't look all that bad. See, it's all relative. Of course, it might be that this was a problem with the original short story, but it made me uneasy seeing it on the big screen. When I watch a movie, I like my good guys to be a little more good than that.

Let's compare this to other movie adaptations of Dick stories. It's not as good as *Blade Runner* or *Minority Report*, and perhaps as good as *Total Recall* (but I give the edge to *TR*, thanks to Arnold, who's at least a real action hero), but it's definitely better than *Screamers*, which was nonsense.

There are some very interesting factual and continuity errors in the movie. I'll leave most of them for you to discover; one was a newspaper clipping with a blunt spelling error in the headline, and another was the fact that a watch with an adjustable band cannot be said to "fit" anyone. It's adjustable! You smart people out there might notice the various physics errors, some of which are quite glaring. But if you can look past those inadequacies, you'll be better entertained.

Among the leads, Thurman turns in the best performance by far. An easy feat, really, when your competition consists of lightweights like Affleck and Eckhart. Eckhart, by the way, is just okay as Jimmy, although I think he kind of underplayed

the role while Affleck overplayed his. Some actors are what they are, though, and at least Eckhart knows he's not really a lead. Affleck still hasn't quite decided if he's an Action Hero, a Romantic Lead, or what.

The DVD contains some extras – interviews with the cast and director, a piece on the stunts in the film, and so on. Most of the interviews were

needless fluff, with everyone congratulating themselves over and over. But what struck me was how Woo compared his film to that of Hitchcock. Sure, John. Hitch would also have had 45 guys with guns surrounding one guy trying to use an access card. Where Hitchcock was simplistic, Woo overcomplicates every scene. It was also interesting that Affleck and Woo describe Affleck's character as kind of an Everyman, "just an engineer." Yeah, just an engineer who somehow knows how to fight and use a gun at the level of a veteran soldier. Just an engineer, indeed. Suddenly Michael is transformed from Einstein to Steven Seagal.

There are also deleted and alternate scenes among the extras. The majority of these scenes were rightly excluded, in my opinion; a couple did clear up some minor

confusion, but adding them would have padded the runtime needlessly. There's also an alternate ending that would have been wholly unsatisfying, not to mention boring. All in all, I'd say the extras included on the DVD were unexceptional.

Paycheck is a solid sci-fi thriller whose plot simply doesn't hold up to close scrutiny. It's saddled with an unconvincing lead in Ben Affleck, but for the most part it overcomes its deficiencies.

Dan Franzen is an amateur phrenologist whose work has appeared in such publications as Famous Oxen of the Fourteenth Century and the best-selling Gnomes I Have Known.



DVD Release Date: May, 2004
Starring: Ben Affleck, Uma Thurman, Aaron Eckhart, & Paul Giamatti
Director: John Woo
Screenplay by: Dean Georganis
Rated: PG-13
Studio: Paramount Home Video
Special Features: Commentary by John Woo; Commentary by Dean Georganis; two "making of" featurettes; deleted scenes; widescreen format.

Review: *Science Fiction: The Literature of the Technological Imagination*

By Matthew Appleton

A little under year ago, my wife started working in the customer service department of The Teaching Company. The Teaching Company offers recordings of some of the nation's top college professors giving lectures on a wide variety of courses covering history, literature, philosophy, mathematics, science and many others. While looking at their catalog, I was thrilled to discover that they offered a course on sf, *Science Fiction: The Literature of the Technological Imagination*, taught by Eric Rabkin. He teaches a course on sf at the University of Michigan and has written numerous books on the genre, including a teaching anthology, *Science Fiction: A Historical Anthology*, which is still in print. Bearing such solid academic credentials, I was interested in hearing what he had to say.

From the start, it's clear that Rabkin structured the course for listeners relatively unfamiliar with the genre and its history. As a result, he spends nearly all of the first half of the course discussing the works of Mary Shelly, Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne and H. G. Wells; the development of the genre, the pulp tradition; the importance of Hugo Gernsback; and John Campbell in the development of modern sf and why the genre is so overwhelmingly American in its flavor and style. While covering these many topics, Rabkin shows an amazing ability to clearly weave into the discussion how classical works such as Sophocles'

Oedipus, the Prometheus myth and the legends of Faust are important to sf's early development, particularly in regards to Shelly's *Frankenstein*. He also pointedly discusses the social criticism inherent in *Frankenstein* and in works such as Poe's "The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar."

But because I am readily familiar with the genre and its history, I frequently found myself wishing he would condense the introductory material a bit more. This desire grew more intense as I drew closer to the midway point in the course. Yes, the information is essential in understanding why sf developed in its peculiar fashion, and Rabkin did a marvelous job of making the information both relevant and interesting. Yet, I couldn't help but feel that he was over-elaborating on some of his points. For example, in his discussion about the sf's pulp origins, Rabkin spends a great deal of time discussing and reading excerpts from *The Huge Hunter: or, The Steam Man of the Prairies*, a dime novel written by Edward S. Ellis in 1868. Without doubt, this wonderful illustration of riotously bad pulp fiction, that in retrospect is blatantly obvious as sf and is at the roots of the genre, was certainly new material to me. However, given that the course is only eight lectures long, I started feeling like Rabkin was short-changing the more important portion of the course—sf's "Golden Age" and the succeeding years.

Professor Rabkin's 15 Great Science Fiction Novels

The following comes from BusinessWeek online. You can see the list and his full comments at http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/04_41/b3903472.htm

1. *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, H. G. Wells, 1896
2. *We*, Yevgeny Zamyatin, 1920
3. *War With the Newts*, Karel Capek, 1936
4. *Limbo*, Bernard Wolfe, 1953
5. *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Walter M. Miller, Jr., 1959
6. *Babel-17*, Samuel R. Delany, 1966
7. *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*, Robert A. Heinlein, 1966
8. *Stand on Zanzibar*, John Brunner, 1968
9. *Left Hand of Darkness*, Ursula K. LeGuin, 1969
10. *The Futurological Congress*, Stanislaw Lem, 1971
11. *Man Plus*, Frederik Pohl, 1976
12. *Where the Late Sweet Birds Sang*, Kate Wilhelm, 1976
13. *China Mountain Zhang*, Maureen F. McHugh, 1992
14. *Galatea 2.2*, Richard Powers, 1995
15. *Calculating God*, Robert J. Sawyer, 2000

Further cutting into his discussion of some of sf's important post-World War II works is a lecture on science fiction film. To be sure, the evolution of cinema throughout the 20th century and the improvement of special effects greatly influenced the direction of the genre's evolution. I agree and feel that the evolution of Hollywood helped turn sf further away from its pulp origins and made it more introspective. Yet, despite some fascinating commentary on movies such as *Them!* and *The Fly*, I again felt that Rabkin was spending too much time on a tangential discussion. After all, the course is supposed to be about science fiction literature.

Left with only three lectures to discuss the last 65 years of the genre, a number of important authors receive only cursory attention. For example, Isaac Asimov is discussed mostly in the context of scientists who wrote sf, and while Rabkin mentions Asimov's "Three Laws of Robotics" and *Foundation Trilogy*, there is no in-depth discussion. In addition, he tackles the entire period covering the New Wave through Cyberpunk over the course of just one lecture, with no work during that period receiving an extended discussion.

Rabkin also tends to stick predominantly to novels, bypassing short stories and novellas, one of the key areas of genre development. He does mention that collapse of the magazine market in the '50s, which ostensibly provides his rationale for bypassing recent short fiction, but that doesn't mean that the market is completely dead—at least

not yet anyway. Someone new to the genre isn't likely to notice all this, but knowledgeable fans certainly will.

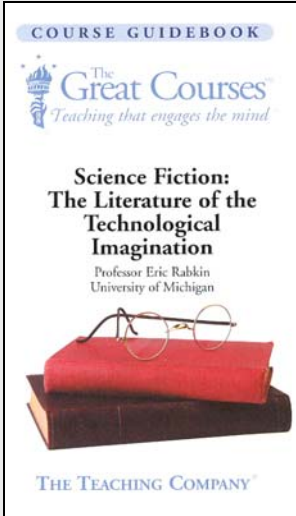
What makes this mad dash through the last 35 years of the genre slightly more disappointing is that Rabkin is an excellent lecturer. He clearly

shows an intricate knowledge of what makes really good sf enjoyable and wonderfully conveys a deep love for the genre. His insightful commentary on the material he chooses, especially in regards to Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*, makes you want to go back and reread this material, or watch it again in the case of movies, even if you have already gone through it numerous times. It also makes you wish that Rabkin spent as much time lecturing on Orson Scott Card's *Ender's War* as he did on *The Steam Man of the Prairies*, or that the course continued past William Gibson's *Neuromancer*.

Ultimately, I was left wishing that the course were longer. In fact, many of the literature courses offered by The Teaching Company are much longer in length. However, for the uninitiated, Rabkin's science fiction course is a wonderful introduc-

tion to the genre and provides a solid foundation for those who intend to explore the genre further.

It should also be noted that unlike other courses offered by the Teaching Company in CD, VHS and DVD formats, *Science Fiction* is only available on audiotope at this time. The Teaching Company has no immediate plans to offer the course in any other format.



Science Fiction: The Literature of the Technological Imagination, taught by Eric Rabkin. Produced by the Teaching Company. Eight 45-minute lectures on audiotape, includes a 36-page course guide. \$39.95 + shipping & handling. Visit The Teaching Company's website at (<http://www.teach12.com/>) or call 1-800-TEACH-12 for details on how to order.

Book Review: *Banner of Souls* by Liz Williams

By Christopher J. Garcia

After having read Liz Williams's *Banner of Souls*, I now know that I would not do well at WisCon, the annual feminist science fiction convention. While there was some wonderful writing and ideas that

shook my mind to the point of looking through itself, I was never able to shake the fact that this was a feminist tale not really intended for an off-white male like myself.

The first two pages set up a tale that I really wanted to hear, a wonderful description of a woman, Dreams-of-War, and her Haunt-tech; a piece of armor that had been imprinted by a warrior long ago. This concept alone carried me through much of the book. The idea of a piece of armor playing a major role in a warrior's story is obvious to me, even more so than that of a sword guiding a journey, a concept I hold a personal hatred for. The interaction between the armor and Dreams-of-War (a name that grated on me after a few chapters, as did all the Martian names) is one that feels more honest than any sage advisor and advisee that I can think of in recent years. After the first few pages of fun on Mars, we were introduced to the thrust of the book.

We are next brought to the far-edge world of Nightshade, the homeworld of Yskaterina Iye and her aunt, Elaki. On page six we arrive at the first signs of the feminist future. There are two points where we are told that the few remaining men of the many worlds were all inferior of strength. This quickly became annoying to me, mostly since it seems to permeate the entire book. It's not that I don't enjoy woman warrior stories—hey, I read *Chicks in Chainmail* and there are quite a few of these story types that have managed to entertain me—but this book seems to be constantly reminding me that the remaining males of the worlds are inferior and weak. This is a story full of matriarchs and Grandmother councils, which does nothing to help my feeling of over-whelming feminist sentiment. Yes, I understand the juxtaposition with traditional science fiction story memes, but it goes a tad far in my eyes.

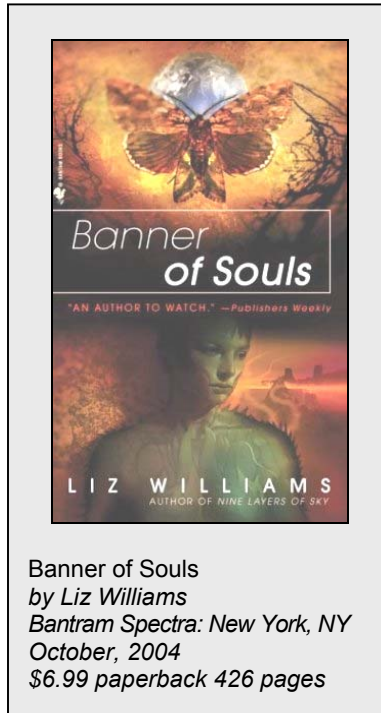
The plot, when boiled down to syrup, is the stuff of an old Tom Mix western. Two gunslingers

come to town (in this case, Earth) for opposing reasons; one to defend a powerless, the other to destroy it. Williams hangs dozens of strong ideas on this simple frame. It is the very simplicity of the main concept that allows for so much playfulness with concepts ranging from time-alterism to the post-cataclysmic peoples and ghosts of Earth and Mars. While this is certainly science fiction at heart, it deftly folds in horror and some high-fantasy elements. I felt that it was a story where Williams had such a powerful set of worlds designed that she gave herself release to play, and that freedom makes the book an enjoyable read to those who can get beyond the socio-political messages that pop up now and again.

While Dreams-of-War and Yskatarina are the two battling forces, the defended one, Lunae, is engaging and most of the interesting exchanges occur over or through her. At times I felt that Lunae was written a bit too much in the vein of the Kwisatz Hader-

ach, the end of a long breeding program to bring about the hito-bashira, the one-who-holds-back-the-flood. The book shows many influences creeping in, with some obvious (Marion Zimmer Bradley and Frank Herbert) and some that only struck me when I put the book down for a couple of hours (Poul Andersen being one that struck me rather shockingly.)

I'm a huge fan of post-apocalyptic Earth stories, always have been, and the Earth presented here is powerfully new in feel, though there are hints of past literary transgressions. While some might say that it's basically a waterworld, there are a great many layers here that Williams plays with. An amphibious race, the Kappi, are an interesting twist, as are the Kami, the strange and powerful race that first visited Nightshade, the further planet from the bright center of the solar system. These races are strong and varied, and the cadre of other villainous monsters only help the story. Ghosts, snake people, Hyenae and a half-dozen other nasties roam the pages, adding to



Banner of Souls
by Liz Williams
Bantam Spectra: New York, NY
October, 2004
\$6.99 paperback 426 pages

the horror elements that help make the book so rich. The only civilized city on Earth, Fragrant Harbor, is the type of city we see so often in novels of this type, though better written and further thought out than most.

Still, Williams writes some strong prose and hits us with some powerful ideas. I'd easily think that *Banner of Souls* was worthy of Hugo nomination in many years, but the feminist ideals still

manage to over-ride a fair amount of the book for me personally. I'd still say that Williams is going to be one of the next big things, and perhaps it will be because of her feminist slant and not her wide-ranging plots and striking ideas.

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

Book Review: *Blind Lake* by Robert Charles Wilson

By Matthew Appleton

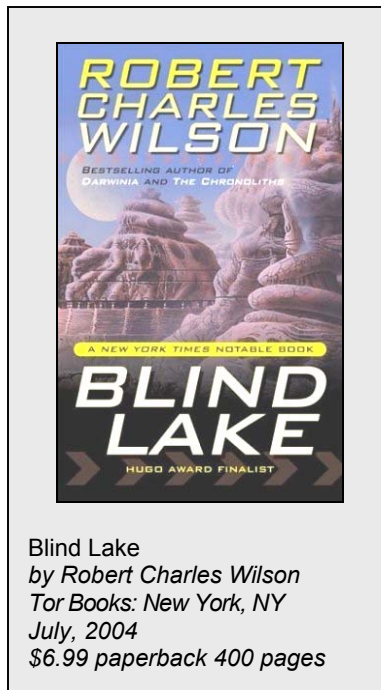
For good reason, many of Robert Charles Wilson's novels appear on year's best lists and on the final ballots for prestigious science fiction awards. He writes engaging, well-paced stories that pull you in quickly and almost demand that you continue reading until the novel is over. He shows an amazing capacity for trying out new settings and scenarios; I might be wrong, but I'm fairly certain that none of his novels thus far is a sequel to a previous work. Certainly, Wilson seems to make it a point to create a brand new world for each of his novels. Even more amazingly, he seems immune from the novel bloat that plagues much of publishing world.

Blind Lake, his most recent novel, is no exception. The story starts with the introduction of Chris Carmody, one of a trio of reporters from a leading science magazine who are visiting the Blind Lake research establishment to write a series of articles regarding the technology making the installation possible. This technology, referred to as "New Astronomy," relies on a form of quantum mechanics to visualize the surface of other planets that are light years away. Chris recently authored a book that was so critical of the work of a particular scientist that he committed suicide because of the resulting controversy. As a consequence, he is now in such throes

of self-doubt that he cannot understand why he was chosen for this assignment. He and the other two journalists have just finished visiting Crossbank, the original research facility based around the technology that makes Blind Lake possible.

Shortly after they arrive in Blind Lake and

begin collecting material for their respective pieces, the entire facility is suddenly thrown into lockdown mode. Absolutely nothing, not even basic radio and telephone communication, is allowed in or out of the complex. As it becomes apparent that this lockdown will continue for an indefinite period, we begin to learn more about the "New Astronomy," the technology and science surrounding it, the people working on the project, and the planet they are studying using this new technology. As we learn more about this facility, it becomes obvious that the research establishment was already in turmoil long before the lockdown started. There's infighting among the researchers about which images they should focus on, the reliability of those images, and their meaning. Nonetheless, they continue studying the alien lifeform native to the world and focusing in particular on one member of the species in an effort to understand its kind and engage in alien cultural anthropology.



Only adding to the anxiety over the project, the scientists don't even understand the technology they're using. In fact, the technology that makes the imagery possible was originally designed to augment and assist the type of telescopes it ultimately replaced. There is such an element of uncertainty behind its operations that one of the primary technicians responsible for keeping the O/BECs, the devices driving the imaging array, up and running states that it's more of an art than a science and that sometimes they're just guessing when they're making adjustments to keep it running properly. The technology is also extremely temperamental, stopping proper operation for no discernable reason and then unexplainably working correctly again. Most disconcertingly, one of the scientists goes so far as to state that the results they get from the telescope are actually counter-intuitive, that it *shouldn't* work at all.

Ray Houser, the nominal head of the project at Blind Lake, certainly isn't helping to contain the chaos—a state which oddly seems appropriate since quantum physics are at the heart of the technology used at the facility. He is a petty, unimaginative and vindictive government administrator who clearly lacks the skills to handle this crisis and places an inordinately high value on his image. Furthermore, his temper and ego frequently overcome his better judgment, especially in regards to his ex-wife Marguerite—an astrozoologist studying the images received at Blind Lake—and their pre-teen daughter Tessa. His shortcomings are obviously apparent to every but himself; so much so that Tessa even notes that her father's house is "like a model of a house put together for showing-off, not living in." With a man like this in charge, it's easy to understand why the dissension among the scientists actively continues.

As the lockdown stretches into months and there's still no communication from the outside world, the chaos within Blind Lake only increases. The O/BECs gradually become more temperamental, and the images from UMa47/E, the planet being studied from Blind Lake, start becoming less focused. Furthermore, some of the researchers, including Marguerite, notice that the alien whose life they are concentrating their

study on seems to sense their presence and is reacting to them—an impossibility given that the planet is 51 light-years away from Earth. Additionally, Marguerite and Ray, whom she reports to as part of her job, argue more frequently over the meaning of the images they are receiving and eventually start arguing over whether the project should be completely shut down. This argument ultimately embroils nearly everyone involved with the project. The tensions start spilling over into their personal lives, and Ray starts experiencing paranoia and becomes convinced that Marguerite is trying to both sabotage his career and estrange him from Tessa.

Tessa provides the novel with an interesting subplot. She's clearly a girl with some sort of mental impairment, either Asperger's or another syndrome, as yet undefined; either way, her social skills clearly lag behind those of her peers. More troubling for her parents, Tessa has an imaginary friend she calls "Mirror Girl," something that she is realistically too old to have. Yet, Mirror Girl's presence grows as the lockdown continues and the problems with the O/BECs increase in frequency and severity. Furthermore, Mirror Girl starts providing Tessa with instructions to watch for upcoming events, thus making it clear that she is more than just a figment of Tessa's imagination. The question then becomes what exactly is Mirror Girl and what role is she playing in the problems at Blind Lake? These questions intensify at the peak of the crisis when Marguerite meets Mirror Girl herself.

As the novel builds to its climax, Wilson tackles a large number of other questions. How do you engage in anthropological study when you have no common elements to serve as a basis for comparison? For that matter, just how reliable are anthropological findings given that a certain amount of assumption is necessary? Is it possible to completely trust a technology that you frankly do not completely understand? Even the nature of quantum physics comes into play when it becomes obvious that the observers are somehow affecting the subject; how important is this to the study? Toward the end of the novel, it's hard not to consider the *Frankenstein* motif and the questions it raises, such as what happens when we lose control of our

creations. Wilson also suggests some rather meta-physical questions concerning the universe, the evolution of man, how we perceive our world (slight shades of Philip K. Dick), and the possibility of intelligent design.

Under all this extrapolation and scientific exploration is an intensely human element. Wilson wonderfully conveys the demoralization caused by being cut-off from the rest of the world for months on end. Even when it becomes obvious that escape from Blind Lake will result in death, people continue to plot ways to escape and avoid getting killed. Wilson also deftly tackles the raw emotion that inevitably blooms when divorced parents argue over their children. Anyone who went through a divorce—either as a parent or as a child—can certainly appreciate the scenes between Ray and Marguerite as they fight over Tessa. Issues of self-esteem and ego are also addressed as individuals try to overcome their fears and short-

comings. Most notably, we see Chris regain his self-confidence as he builds a relationship with Marguerite and comes to grips with the death he feels he caused. It certainly appears that he needed to be cut off from the rest of the world in order to become whole again.

In all, *Blind Lake*, deserves the accolades it received (among other citations, it was a Hugo finalist and *New York Times* Notable Book of the Year.) As with his previous novels *Darwinia* and *Bios*, Wilson shows a tremendous flair for creating vividly describing different alien environments. With the exception of über-villain Ray, who despite Wilson's best efforts to give us insights into his psychoses comes across as somewhat two-dimensional, the characters and the conflicts involving them are utterly engaging. Most importantly, Wilson writes an absorbing tale that both entertains and gets us to think a little more critically about the world around us.

Fiction: “Are You Ready For the End of the World?”

By Danny Adams

The following story originally appeared in the October/November, 2004 issue of *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine*.

Would you like to know how to escape the imminent destruction of the Earth?

Sure, we all would.

And this site can help. Our specially-trained instructors can assist you in putting together your very own personal starship to get off this planet before its obliteration.

Unbeknownst to your scientists at posting time, an extraordinarily large rogue asteroid (seventy-four kilometers long by Terran standards—that's about forty miles to you Americans) has been captured by your sun's gravity and is now cheerfully rolling along a direct collision course with Earth. It will strike your planet on October 17th somewhere in the vicinity of the University of California at Berkeley.

Our apologies if this causes a widespread panic, but we just thought you should know.

This is where we come in. Greetings, Terrans, we are from the planet Panodex in the star cluster you colloquially call the Pleiades. We have been studying your planet for 156,347 Terran years, and are primarily responsible for the teasing glimpses of so-called UFOs which have driven your society insane since well prior to 1947.

Being the inquisitive Terrans you are, you are certainly asking yourselves by now: “Who are these aliens and why do they want to help us?” Or if you are a UFO conspiracy theorist, then, “If your intentions are so good, why not just show yourselves and evacuate the planet? If what you say is even true, and you're not just telling us this to cause worldwide panic and confuse the populace long enough to invade Earth and turn us all into off-world sex slaves or human casseroles?”

All very good questions.

The truth is, we are at (what you would call a) heart selfish bastards. After putting one-hundred and fifty millennia into studying your fascinating culture, we don't want our investment to go up in a single cosmic boom. However, the hardass noninterference laws of the Galactic Amalgam forbid us to act directly, so instead we're constrained to help

by waiting for you to freely download this document via your Worldwide Web.

“But,” you may ask, “if you’re allowed to put all of this technology on a website, why haven’t you done so before?”

Please note our “selfish bastard” comment. We would have been more than happy to sell you most of our interstellar knowledge in exchange for the majority of your precious metals (which you wouldn’t have missed all that much anyway), except we are likewise forbidden to do so. We’ve been appealing the Constables’ decision for eons but the red tape is intergalactically immense.

We can at least settle one thing: this asteroid is speeding toward your planet at 90,000 kilometers per hour, it will not burn up in your thinning atmosphere, it will strike on October 17th with the force of a 300 million megaton bomb, and if you think this website is a hoax then you will learn otherwise in a flash of illumination.

Now, having put all that out in the open, shall we begin?



Nobody liked Jerry Jarvis and he hated everybody else, though no one was sure which came first.

By the age of three he was a solidly developed, card-carrying (or nametagged, as the case may have been) misanthrope, causing grief for parents, neighbors, other toddlers, local pets, and small bugs who lost their legs whenever Jerry went hunting.

Today, sixteen years later, everyone instinctively shied away from Jerry as if sensing his deep desire to rip their legs off. He was happily failing his classes; only the football scholarship and being the school’s best-ever pile-driving quarterback kept him in school at all.

He had his own dorm room. His closest companion was his computer. On September 17th, a little over one year into his bumpy academic career, he happened across a rather plain-looking website called

ARE YOU READY FOR THE END OF THE WORLD? (The Terran’s Complete Instructions For The Apocalypse)

It wasn’t easy to find. Jerry located it by entering the keywords Apocalypse, Death, Destruction, Dismemberment, and twenty-six other nouns and verbs concerning planetary devastation and human extinction into a search engine.

The address www.cosmicbang.com appeared. Having nothing better to do that Saturday night, Jerry started reading.



Pardon our bluntness, but if you believe your current technology can deflect a seventy-four kilometer nickel-iron-uranium asteroid even the barest fraction of a degree, thus heroically saving your planet as displayed in so many bad video presentations, then we have a causal time loop to Arcturus we’d like to sell you.

Your only hope for survival is to get off the Earth entirely. Which leaves you two questions: First, how? And second, where do I go?

Your choice of destinations is endless. We can provide you with names and trajectories for each and every world suitable to supporting Terran life, along with an ANSI map of their solar systems. (Sorry, ANSI was the best we could do on short no-



Illustration © 2004 by Brian Smith.

tice.)Your major concern will be building your transportation. No worries about risking life and limb swiping a few rods of Uranium-235 from your local nuclear plant, either. You can build a perfectly spaceworthy Einstein-busting space-time-warping craft from the comfort of your kitchen.

Trust us, we've been doing this for a long time. Any questions?



Jerry believed the doom-filled prognostications, though he wasn't sure why. They *spoke* to him.

And for some reason he did a very un-Jerry Jarvis-like thing: he tried warning people about the danger.

They looked at him funny. Not because of his predictions, but for talking to them in the first place. And trying to *help* them.

It made no sense.

Nobody listened."

Fine, if that's the way it's going to be," Jerry muttered on the way back to his room. "Let them all get vaporized."



Now might be a good time to admit that there is a flaw in our starship plan: Only one person can go. (If you're reading this, no one has volunteered yet.)

The ship's gravofusic signature will open a wormhole to your final destination — but that wormhole can open only once. So only you will be able to escape. Everything and everyone else on Earth will be destroyed.

If you're OK with this, [click here](#) and fill out our form...Great! Now that you've downloaded the DOC, this site will permanently lock out other users. You're ready to go!



Some of the necessary items Jerry already possessed, including the aluminum foil, three-hole punch, and telephone wire. The oil-based paints and tin cans he could get from the college PX. The galvanized sheet metal, slot machine memory chips and automatic transmission from a Dodge pickup truck would be a bit more difficult. But Jerry had discovered that his parents (and numerous others) would wire him any amount of money he demanded in order to keep him from communicating with them.

Within an hour Jerry had the funds to construct his continuum-riding masterpiece. Now he just needed a place to build it.

The choice was obvious: The football field. Everyone knew Jerry was the primary reason Old River Tech won every game, and furthermore he let them know he would quit the team if they didn't give him a little grassy patch near the stadium to create his "project".

Humanity's great migration to the stars had commenced.



Your current space technology confuses us.

One bewildering aspect is the heat shielding on your space shuttles. Thousands of little custom-made interlocking plates with a tendency to scorch or fall off, and thus require frequent replacement at great expense and inconvenience. Throw out that interlocking mentality right now, mister.

Your temporal shields will absorb the impact not only of solar radiation, but also any Continuum-borne particles you may encounter on your flight. And Ultimate Force knows the Continuum is littered with junk tossed aside by

those who care nothing for the aesthetics of their interspace highways.

The shields will incorporate the simple Vel'thi'dan Proofs of Deflective Warping. To begin, you will need your blender, wet cell batteries, a spritzer, and acid-free paper.

Remember not to hurt yourself when you solder.



Many of the so-called wits of Old River Tech laughed when Jerry built his starship. They called it "Jerry's Ark", "Dumbass", or worst of all, "Modern Art".

They would see. In that half-second of burning realization, they would know he was right all along.

The destruction of humanity would indeed be a sweet day for Jerry Jarvis. "You'll see!" he shouted whenever anyone walked by. "When the asteroid hits the Earth and you're dead, then you'll see!"

"Just look for it," Jerry told the news crews on the afternoon he finished welding the last porthole into the Ford LTD-sized ship. "The asteroid is there. You haven't seen it yet, but it's coming. Oh baby, it's coming, and when it comes you'll all be sorry you didn't listen to Jerry Jarvis.

"That very interview inspired his ship's name: *The S.S. Living Well Is The Best Revenge*. A little cumbersome, but he liked the sentiment.

Yet on the fourteenth day of his great venture, two weeks from H-Hour, with the hull of his pride and joy completely built and specially equipped with a beanbag-turned-custom-designed-captain's-conn, Jerry started having reservations.

What if this was really a hoax after all? What if someone had thrown the site together for a laugh and was getting an even bigger laugh now... at Jerry's expense?

He'd show them, then. It would work. He'd make it work.



While traveling at superluminal speeds, you may notice that you have something of an ongoing problem with inertia.

You feel like the whole galaxy is against you. As if everyone in the universe is trying to stop what you need to accomplish.

Yeah," said Jerry. "That's it. Everybody's against me."

In other words, if you're warping along minding your own business when somebody runs a red quark at a four-way crosstime intersection and you collide, you will be reduced in a nanosecond to a glob of tapioca pudding splattered across five-hundred light years.

What can you do to prevent this unfortunate demise?

Terrans, like most carbon-based life forms, were simply not meant to travel naturally faster than light. Otherwise Ultimate Force would have given you gravofusic collectors, and not the Capellans. Thus you'll need something to dampen the multimillion-g pressures that would otherwise transform you into microscopic kibbles.

You can accomplish this with the same Deflectional principles employed in your shields, except this time they will be acting on your poor fragile body simultaneously with your ship. Dampening fields will divert the kinetic forces (as you understand them) whether your braking is planned and gradual, or suddenly to avoid a head-on collision with a drunk Capellan.

Don't let inertia get you down. Don't give up the ship just because of the infinitesimal possibility of being smudged across your home galaxy. You can fight back no matter what forces are set against you.



With that assurance, Jerry went back to work full throttle."

I could show you how to make a ship like this," he told the community once in a local UHF channel

interview. "But not so long as you're laughing at me."

"So you would let all of humanity die?" asked the newscaster, a petite smiling thing dressed in an almost-too-short miniskirt.

"Well hey, it's not like I want the human race to be extinct or anything." Jerry fought back a laugh. "I'm just tired of people. I mean...I'm tired of people laughing at me."

"We can't actually see this DOC of yours on the website, Jerry."

"It locked after I downloaded it. The wormhole only opens once, you know."

"Well, we'll see!" the reporter clamped down on a smile. "For Channel Thirteen On-Your-Spot News..."

They'll see, he thought.

The leggy reporter surveyed the accessories strewn around his spacecraft. "So you're really planning on warping yourself to another planet using Vaseline, copper antenna cables, and a rock tumbler?"

"It's a spacetime thing. You wouldn't understand."

Maybe he'd just gaze at the world while the asteroid pulverized it, then chuckle before heading on to his new home—Panodex, home of the benefactors of his continued existence. He felt a pre-mourning pang for the reporter's legs.



Undoubtedly the disbelievers will think you are insane.

Comfort yourself in the knowledge that there will always be disbelievers when it comes to the end of a planet. Believing that your world will go on forever has become vogue.

Don't let them distract you. All that remains before your voyage is to secure a calculator and connect it into the circuit of your spatial flux inducer, window fan, and freezer. You can use this to program the exact coordinates for your new homeworld into the temporal fields so the ship can take over navigation while you sit back, relax, have a Coke and smile.

Feel free to bring your computer. Hooking it into the spatial flux inducer will allow you to not only chart your ship's progress, but also amuse yourself by wasting hundreds of hours in meaningless conversations with other sentient beings on IRC, the Intergalactic Relay Chat.

Good luck, Terran, and may the Ultimate Force go with you.



The day of the launch, Jerry almost had an epiphany.

He was snuggling into his captain's beanbag when he was slammed with guilt. He knew now beyond the shadow of a doubt that the asteroid was real and on a collision course with Earth.

He'd caught the news surfing the net. Astronomers all over the world had discovered the asteroid the night before, almost exactly twenty-four hours before impact. World governments scrambled for a solution but guessed even nuclear warheads would only shatter the monster into equally lethal fragments.

Jerry slumped back into his seat, crinkling the beans, the weight of all those impending graves thrust suddenly upon him. True, the DOC said not to worry. How many would've believed him anyway?

What right did he have to survive while six billion other people died?

A moment later he discarded the notion, then packed his clothes, trophies, and nachos.

What did he owe anyone on Earth anyway? Nada. Squat. They never did anything for him but make his life miserable. Rotten, stinking, miserable, selfish Terrans. They could use the comeuppance."

See you later, suckers!" Jerry yelled from his command cockpit. "You shouldn't have treated me so bad! Oh well, c'est la vie, Earth!"

Despite all his certainty that he could make the *S.S. Living Well Is The Best Revenge* fly, he was still a

little surprised when it did. It lifted straight up soundlessly—not including the whirring blender (set on Puree for atmospheric travel) and the swooshing fanblades that spun open the gravofusic warp. Before he could say “Jack Daniels” he was gazing down at the rolling green hills surrounding Old River Tech, then the curve of the Earth, and then up towards the stars.

The blinking cursor on his PC monitor spelled out *Please input spatial coordinates now.*

“Oh, sorry,” Jerry chuckled. On his little solar powered calculator (luckily he remembered to bring a flashlight for its power source) he punched in 1111111111.001 for Panodex, then reset his blender for Liquefy (wormhole travel.)

Thank you so much.

Daylight faded completely and Jerry abruptly traced the shape of the asteroid ahead. It was strangely luminescent in the sunlight and closing on Earth fast.

It's beautiful, Jerry thought as the ship drew closer. *I guess the Angel of Death doesn't really have to wear a black robe and carry a sickle.*

Only then did he notice that he was still getting closer to the asteroid.

He muttered “Uh-oh” as he pulled up the DOC again from his hard drive. “New coordinates... gotta get new coordinates...”

Hello sucker.

“What?” His eyes widened, reflecting the monitor’s steady glow.

You were obviously not sufficiently facile to discover this final message of DOC until your programmed coordinates triggered it.

“How did you know what coordinates I’d program?” Jerry shouted.

Actually, any coordinates we gave you would have put you on a collision course with the asteroid, only at different speeds or angles. Just a little joke on you, then. LOL.

Jerry’s head slumped into his arms, so the computer graciously turned verbal.

“As we explained at the beginning, we are selfish bastards. Did you honestly think we would waste 156,347 Terran years of research? Don’t be silly. Any advanced species could have seen that from a million miles away. We knew that you were a paranoid and self-serving race, and at least one of you would succumb to our bait even if your survival doomed the rest of humanity. Whoever you are, you who are about to die, we salute you.”

“Die?” Jerry blubbered.

“Of course a few of the old guard in the Galactic Amalgam will be pissed that we took matters into our own appendages instead of letting the universe’s nature take its course. But hey, it’s easier to get forgiveness than permission.”

“Stop it! Let me go!” Jerry pounded on the monitor first, then jabbed random numbers into his calculator. He vaulted back to the beanbag to retake manual control, but no blender setting altered his upcoming rendezvous.

“You will be remembered on Panodex as a great hero,” the computer said. “Would you like to record any last messages?”

The asteroid brilliantly filled Jerry’s bow viewport.

“Quit laughing at me,” he muttered.

Three seconds before impact he happened to glance out his starboard porthole and saw a little silver disk blinking its lights at him, then dipping in a salute. Jerry waved back sadly.

The delayed flash of illumination that he’d been tricked came at the same instant as the flash which incinerated both Jerry Jarvis’ masterpiece, and Jerry himself.



Now as any seasoned space traveler knows, you cannot destroy a seventy-four kilometer asteroid

with a starship the size of a Terran Ford LTD. There just isn't enough oomph in the resulting detonation.

However, as predicted by nine out of ten Panodexian temporal physicists, the abrupt disturbance in the spacetime continuum caused by the gravofusic ripple of Jerry's atomization tore a hole in the Continuum seventy-eight kilometers wide and nearly as tall, more than enough to neatly suck the asteroid into the fourth dimension and gulp it down whole.

The Panodexians observed this with immense satisfaction. Earth was saved; their fruitful research could continue. And maybe someday, a few millennia down the road, the G.A. would rescind its hardass noninterference rule before the Terrans could develop interstellar travel on their own, and the Panodexians could make off with the even more fruitful profit of the Earth's precious metals. That would truly be a day for rejoicing.

On Earth, astronomers watched their plunging Asteroid of Death suddenly disappear. The only clue to its whereabouts was a mysterious spiking "burp" on their cosmic counters the instant it vanished."

See, I told you it would miss us," one of the starwatchers chided his colleagues. "Any idiot could have seen that from a million miles away."

Danny Adams is, among a lot of other things he won't go into here, a college librarian deep in the Blue Ridge Mountains. His wife Laurie tops his inspiration list, followed by history and political shenanigans.

His first short story, "Never Eat Strange Berries", appeared in 1995 in an anthology of Virginia genre writers titled New Dominions. Since then his work has been published in such places as the original Event Horizon, Dreams of Decadence, Mythic Delirium, Strange Horizons, Not One Of Us, Andromeda Spaceways In-flight Magazine, and the print edition of Scifaikuest. Sometime in the near future he has more stories coming up in Revolution Science Fiction and a new online magazine by the folks who bring you Nth Degree.

DVD Review: *Hellboy*

By Richard Fuller

"I Was Instantly in Love With It"

You're wondering: who's the "I" and what the Hades is "it"? "I" is filmmaker Guillermo del Toro, Mexican writer-director of *Cronos* (1993) and *The Devil's Backbone* (2001). The "it" is graphic novel *Hellboy: Seed of Destruction* (1994) by Mike Mignola.

If you know what a graphic novel is, don't Homer Simpson sneer, "D'oh, it's a comic book."

Yes and no. Let's flick back to motion pictures—and recall, historians, that movies and comics began about the same time. *Filmgoers* would see the subtitled *The Devil's Backbone* at an Art House. *Moviegoers* would see flicks like *Mimic* (1997) and *Blade II* (2002) at a movie theater. But, the "commercial" *Mimic* and *Blade II* and the "arty" *Devil's Backbone* were all made by del Toro. *Blade II* (with the idiosyncratic Ron Perlman) is based on a Marvel comic book, and *Backbone* was adapted from a popular Spanish comic—d'oh, graphic novel?—called *Paracuellos* by Carlos Gimenez.

If you've seen storyboards for a movie—drawings of every camera setup for that movie—you might think of them as a kind of comic book version of the particular motion picture. When you look at a comic book/graphic novel, you'll sometimes see a would-be *motion* picture in all those still drawings, especially when the huge word "BLAM!" appears above someone firing a gun.

Even though the graphic novel of *Hellboy* appeared a decade before the movie version—and del Toro argued some seven years with the studio over his insisting the appropriately unusual Ron Perlman play *Hellboy*, a part Perlman was visually and spiritually born to play—we'll begin with *Hellboy*, the 2004 movie.

Confession: I've only seen the DVD (i.e., television) version of *Hellboy* on our new 32-inch TV, which made me wish I'd first seen it in a theater on the biggest screen possible.

Credits for *Hellboy* on the Internet Movie Data Base list these words after Genre: "Adventure/Horror/Sci-Fi/Action." Science fiction devotees hate that abbreviation "sci-fi." You either say "science fiction" or "sf" Saying "sci-fi" to a devotee could get you kicked in Uranus and given a one-way ticket to Pluto.

Hellboy begins with these words onscreen:

"In the coldest regions of space, the monstrous entities Ogdrú Jahad—the Seven Gods of Chaos—slumber in their crystal prison, waiting to reclaim Earth... and burn the heavens."

Des Vermis Mysteriis, page 87

We next hear more words in a male voiceover:

"What is it that makes a man a man? Is it his origins, the way things start? Or is it something else? Something harder to describe? For me, it all began in 1944; classified mission off the coast of Scotland. The Nazis were desperate. Combining science and black magic, they intended to upset the balance of the war. I was 28, already a paranormal advisor to President Roosevelt. I would never have suspected that what would transpire that night would not only affect the course of history but change my life forever."

The mention of the year 1944 and Nazis suggests a "genre" not listed for *Hellboy*: War. World War II and the hellish Hitler. Is this movie going to be a Science Fiction/War picture?

Hellboy begins in a haunting night-time blue that is one of the film's two major hues. The other—think of the title—is red. We're into a creepy war movie as the good guys, American soldiers, run through a tunnel-like corridor and then into a desolate area—church ruins?—with a large statue of Christ on the cross. That 28-year-old who spoke the voiceover stands before the statue, a cross on a chain dangling from his hand. He's Prof Broom, played in this sequence by Kevin Trainor but maybe voice-dubbed by the great John Hurt, who plays the older Broom.

"Are you a Catholic?" a G.I. asks Broom. Of course. Should the "genre" Religion be added?

As they spy on evil Nazis "combining science and black magic," you see two major villains: Hitler's top assassin Karl Kroenen (Ladislav Beran), who has a metal face and long blades that appear to flash out of his arms; and Grigori Rasputin (Karel Roden), who's promised Hitler a "miracle." The latter's blonde Ilsa (Biddy Hodson) is lovingly, loyally by Rasputin's side.

The miracle? As a huge metallic hand (right one), with endless wires, is attached to Rasputin, the courtyard's apparatus turns Frankenstein-like and a huge portal (think *Stargate*) opens and you soar through it and toward a monstrous reddish eye in the hades-heavens. Rasputin has promised that the Seven Gods of Chaos will awaken, come through the portal, destroy all enemies and evoke a new Eden from the ashes. Will Rasputin and Ilsa be the new Adam and Eve?

Jump-cut from that Sci-Fi—oops, sf—back to War as the Americans start throwing grenades, Nazis fly through the air and one of them soars onto, his body shattering like glass, that portal. Rasputin flies through the portal (an important plot point) and Karl is impaled on a spear. Karl soon "disappears" from that spear, another important plot point.

The good guys have apparently kept the Chaotic Seven off the earth.

However... Something *has* come back through the portal: A little red thing with a tail and tiny horns on its head. It zooms about. A scared G.I. thinks it's an ape. Fatherly Broom sees a spooked little one, reaching out with an opened Baby Ruth candy bar. The little one has a huge right hand (like that metallic apparatus with fingers Rasputin wore?) and a small "normal" left one. He snatches and gobbles the candy bar. Broom asks for a blanket, the kid leaps into it and Broom cuddles him like his baby. A soldier says, "It's a boy." New "daddy" Broom names his offbeat surrogate son Hellboy.

And someone takes a photograph of everyone and the new kid.

Then there's a brief sequence of swirling items and newspaper headlines—"The Government Denies He Exists" and "FBI Made Deal With Devil-Boy?" and even a *Hellboy* comic book, not the

“graphic novel” This curtain-raiser, before the film’s title appears, lasts some 13-plus minutes.

Much of the movie that follows delivers marvelous kick-ass Adventure and Horror and SF and Action. And the endless War—not just World War II—of Good versus Evil. Plus that other genre called Romance.

Here’s the main line-up of Good Guys and the Evil Ones:

Hellboy (Ron Perlman.) Although it’s been nearly 60 years since he was adopted by Prof Broom, he’s now considered just past 20—definitely not yet a man or a human being (think Pinocchio). He does work for the FBI, goes out on cases with a huge pistol and glowy bullets, cigars and lighter, and a mouthful of wise-guy talk. To that line-up of genres, add Crime (i.e., Private Eye). When something falls on his head, he pauses and then wiseguys, “Ow.” He eats six times a day! And Baby Ruths. Sometimes called “H.B.” by Liz (see below), he spends much of the movie fighting a most offbeat, aquatic “crouching tiger” called Sammael that won’t die.

Abe Sapien (Doug Jones.) Hellboy’s odd-couple partner on cases is sometimes called “Blue” (H.B., of course, “Red”) and looks like a relative of Creature From the Black Lagoon. Abe talks and reads lots of books, very swiftly, through his fish tank. If you place a hand on his fishy one, you can “see” the past and/or future. No Baby Ruths for this one. He *loves* rotten eggs!

Liz Sherman (Selma Blair.) As a kid, when classmates picked on her, Liz discovered her hands, and then her body, would release flames and everything around her would burn. Considers herself a freak like Hellboy and Abe. That’s why she almost always looks and sounds depressed.

Hellboy, who sometimes calls her “Sparky,” is in love with her. So is John Myers.

John Myers (Rupert Evans.) The kid with a catch in his throat arrives on a motorcycle at the Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense—in Newark, New Jersey!—as Hellboy’s new “liaison” because Prof Broom is dying. Takes an elevator downward to section 51. Hellboy thinks he’s a dork—but worries that Liz loves him. When Myers first meets Hellboy, he offers the red one Baby Ruths. H.B. *loathes* the kid. Think they’ll end up friends?

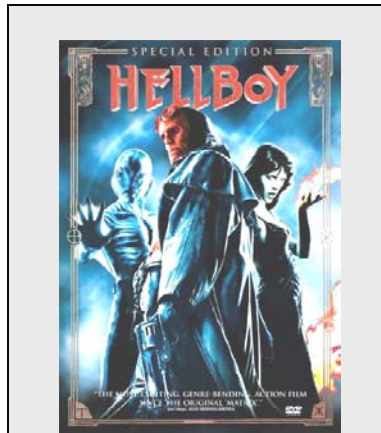
Karl Kroenen. After the film’s title appears onscreen, Mr. Metal Face and Blades for Arms goes to blue-hued Moldavia with that blonde Nazi gal. They watch her beloved Rasputin arise, from a circular structure on the ground (think *The X-Files*), in a bloodbath ruddier than Hellboy. Talk about bloodbath! Karl slaughters all the guards at a museum (a major plot point sequence) and later kills the beloved Prof Broom. Think you’ll want him dead? But how?

Rasputin. You may hope those Seven Gods of Chaos gobble up this slime from under a rock in Hades. Make that a rock under Moldavia. What in un-heaven does that blonde Nazi see in this creature? Or he in her?

Sammael (Brian Steele.) This unearthly one has crazed tentacles all over his head and a big reptilian mouth and leaves yellowish eggs behind, including three in

Hellboy’s arm. The Good Guys have to hunt down the egg lair and destroy it, along with this Chaotic One, or else!

In spite of that title and a bit too much ass-kicking, Hellboy isn’t a kids’ movie. Those opening words on the screen—not exactly Star Wars



DVD Release Date: July, 2004
Starring: Ron Perlman, Selma Blair, Jeffrey Tambor, Karel Roden, Rupert Evans and John Hurt
Directed by and Screenplay by: Guillermo del Toro
Rated: PG-13
Studio: Columbia Studios
Special Features: Video introductions; Creator and cast audio commentaries; Branching DVD comics drawn by Mike Mignola; “Right Hand of Doom” set visits; Storyboard track; Gerald McBoing Boing animated shorts; DVD-ROM includes printable original screenplay, script supervisor’s book and director’s notebook; Hellboy: The Seeds of Creation - a 2½-hour documentary on the making of the film; Deleted scenes with optional commentary by Guillermo del Toro; Character bios written by the director; Trailers and TV spots; wide-screen anamorphic format.

enticing—would possibly put off many little ones. And the picture is based on a graphic novel, which is a grownup version of most comic books. The gothic-hued artwork is often austere and memorable. However, Mike Mignola doesn't include a romantic link (grownup stuff) between Liz and Hellboy (didn't even occur to him) and he doesn't do much with the surrogate father-son relationship. Broom is killed early in the graphic novel.

Guillermo del Toro may have fallen in love at first sight—like a movie!—with the graphic novel, but he uses that love to create his own film version, taking somewhat flat “storyboards,” as it were, and making them round. And his memorable visuals resonate throughout his motion picture. His ongoing boyish adoration of the medium is obvious in the many references to pictures he's in love with. The first viewer to recognize 100 would probably get a grin, a big hug and an A+ from Guillermo. Consider when Hellboy sees a huge doorway descending, rushes toward it, sliding under it, and then pulls his tail just in time from beneath that slamming door. Holy Indiana Jones!

Way beyond a kids' flick and those “quotes,” the film elevates Broom and Hellboy into a soul-resonating experience about an unearthly boy brought through that portal by Nazis to do evil but then adopted by a religious man who wants his surrogate son to become a man. And Catholic? Broom's cross is a major player in Hellboy's human, humane choice.

The way the first *Star Wars* movie was lifted beyond just 12-year-olds by including the great Alec Guinness, *Hellboy* is elevated into a memorable Odd Couple movie by Ron Perlman's wonder-

fully slangy, blue-collar, smartass private-eye variation and John Hurt's elegantly compassionate and totally loyal, if demanding, surrogate father. You'll revisit the movie for them, not Hellboy slamming it out with Sammael (or “Sam” and “Stinky,” as H.B. calls him).

Guillermo del Toro speaks English fluently in the DVD's many extras, making it clear why he writes both Spanish and English scripts for his films. His rotund presence suggests a little boy who fell in love with the movie medium “instantly” and is still in love with it. He and graphic novelist Mike Mignola are fascinating to hear. Mike wanted Guillermo to do *his* version of his novel. And it's intriguing to see the “freak” characters without their transforming “bodies” that take four hours to attach.

How important is an actor's voice? A critic once said if you're going to dub an actor's voice (is Kevin Trainor as the young Broom dubbed by John Hurt?), why not “dub” his head? All the actors in this film have effective voices except, to my ears, Selma Blair's Liz. In character, she sounds constantly down and kind of wussy.

When we hear her as herself in the DVD extras, she still sounds down and sort of wussy. As a sort of Hades P.S., I'd recommend, after you leave *Hellboy*, that you head directly toward *The Devil's Backbone*, Guillermo del Toro's haunting, ghostly masterpiece.

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

Book Review: *The Cat's Pajamas & Other Stories* by James Morrow

By Matthew Appleton

James Morrow made quite a splash for himself when he killed God and dropped his body into the Atlantic Ocean in *Towing Jehovah*, thus starting his “Godhead Trilogy.” He won World Fantasy Award for his efforts and built upon the notoriety he first achieved with *This Is the Way the World Ends*, his short fiction, and *Only Begotten Daughter*, thus earning comparisons to Kurt Vonnegut as a leading satirist. In the five years since completing the Godhead Trilogy with the publication of *The Eternal Footman*, Morrow has mostly focused his energy on a new project centering on the Salem Witch Hunt tentatively titled

The Last Witchfinder. However, he still finds time to write short fiction, and we now have a new collection, *The Cat's Pajamas*, to pass the time until *Witchfinder* hits the bookshelves.

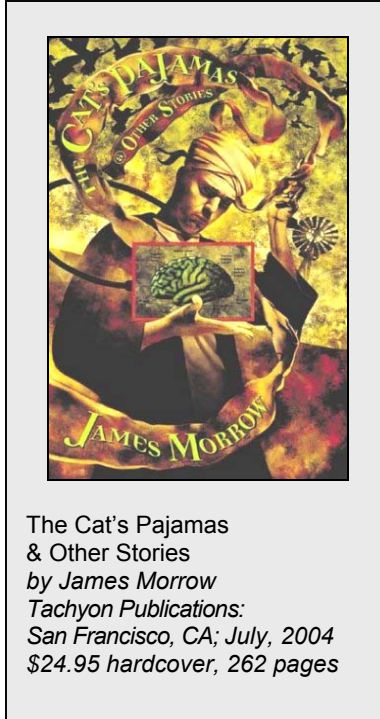
The collection starts with "War of the Worldviews," in which two sentient Martian species descend upon Manhattan and shut it off from the outside world. In an unusual twist, the two species came not to invade but to use New York City as a neutral battleground for a final apocalyptic battle between the two. Eventually, the narrator figures out that the only way to stop them and save the city is by enlisting the help of a trio of mental patients. The story engages in a favorite theme of Morrow's, the battle between religion and rationalism. Morrow rather expectantly comes down on the side of rationalism, but literally only because of a coin flip. He even suggests that neither side is inherently better than the other and that both are equal in their strength. Given the post-9/11 worldviews we all have developed and the role New York City played on that day, it's hard not to superimpose them on this story and conclude that Morrow believes that the war between America and the Islamic fundamentalism championed by Osama Bin Laden is ultimately a fruitless war that neither will win on their own.

But the story isn't solely about the state of world affairs and moralism as Morrow fully employs his satirical skills. Each of the trio of mental patients harbors a unique quirk. Rupert Klieg, the first one we encounter, is prone to sharing home-grown snippets of wisdom such as "If you were a fly, horse manure would smell like candy." The next, Melvin Haskin, monitors Martian broadcasts with a receiver that still relies on vacuum tube technology and supposedly fixes its burned out tubes merely by laying his hands on them. Finally, Annie Porlock, a woman who lives in a half-sunk houseboat off of Roosevelt Island, claims she

transformed her harpsichord into an interplanetary communication device. If these three are what it takes to stop this particular war of worldviews, we can only imagine what it will take to stop the war we find ourselves in now.

Morrow follows this up with the touching "Wisdom of the Skin." Ostensibly, it's about the impossibility of truly cloning an individual. The story is about Bruno and Mina Pearl, a pair of "performance copulists," people who engage in public intercourse in an artistic fashion. When Mina is shot and is brain damaged, the doctor offers her husband with a solution that will allow him to continue their art. Even though he provides a way to reproduce the personality of the subject, predictably the whole is not quite the sum of its parts and the clones in this story end up as failures. In fact, astute readers will even figure out what happens to them before the story ends. However, near the end of the story, Morrow quickly and flawlessly shifts the focus of the story to the Pearls in order to show how the very thing that makes it impossible to clone people also gives us the strength as individual to overcome mammoth obstacles, especially when love is involved.

The next story, "Martyrs of the Upshot Knot-hole," lacks the emotional impact of its predecessor but still makes for good entertainment. Morrow uses the ill-fated shooting of the 1956 John Wayne film *The Conqueror* as the genesis for this story. For those who don't know, *The Conqueror*—a biography of Genghis Khan—was shot downwind of the Yucca Flats, Nevada nuclear testing range and many of the people involved in the shooting eventually succumbed to cancer caused by the extremely elevated background radiation levels. The Duke, who played Khan in the movie, appears in the story, which centers on a fictional actress from the film who portrayed Hunlun, Khan's mother and portrayed by Agnes Moorehead in real life. This story of healing and redemption shows the



The Cat's Pajamas
& Other Stories
by James Morrow
Tachyon Publications:
San Francisco, CA; July, 2004
\$24.95 hardcover, 262 pages

ability of personal relationships to overcome the divisiveness politics has come to symbolize.

The next couple stories in *The Cat's Pajamas* make for relatively light and enjoyable reading. "Come Back, Dr. Sarcophagus" is a loving homage to the weekend horror hosts that appeared on UHF television stations all across the country before cable television drove a stake into their collective heart. This is followed by "The Fate of Nations" in which we discover a big secret hidden from women across the world, why men seem to be so drawn to watching team sports and how the Super Bowl, among other events, means much more than just crowning the winner of the NFL season.

Morrow returns to the issue of cloning in "The Eye that Never Blinks." This time, the fantastic intrudes upon our rational and scientific age, and one scientist has the ability to make the world an incredibly better place, just by cloning a unique fish that brings about miracles. However, doing so means effectively ending our modern age of reason. Can he bring himself to do so? Again, long-time readers of Morrow probably won't be too surprised by the scientist's choice, but how he disposes of the problem is certainly amusing and deceptively foreshadowed.

The next major story in the collection is the Nebula-nominated "Auspicious Eggs." This story presents a dystopian post-deluge future where the Catholic Church now rules the remaining above-water portions of the United States. Expanding upon the notion that all unborn life is sacred, all unconceived life is sacred as well, and the Church has altered law, doctrine and religious rights to ensure that every egg and sperm gets its chance to bring about life. However, it's also a world of falling fertility rates and incredibly limited natural resources, so fertility tests are performed upon all newborns. Those deemed unable to conceive are "terminally baptized" in order to stop them from draining precious resources and to save them from the sin of failing to procreate.

The relatively humorless story is dark, depressing, foreboding and ambiguous—especially when you think about how little difference there is between terminal baptism and a third trimester abortion. Still, Morrow shows he is not completely unsympathetic to the Church laity and depicts one

individual who can no longer bring himself to engage in "terminal baptism." The ending of the story is reminiscent of his novella *City of Truth*, but it lacks its optimistic ending.

Some of that optimism returns in "Apologue," a story Morrow wrote in the aftermath of the attacks on 9/11. While dealing with the wreckage caused by the terrorist attacks, New York City is revisited by a few of its former skyscraper-sized foes who come to help in any way they can. They may have fought the city in the past, but it's still their city and they feel the same emotions everyone else in the country did after the attacks. Its sentimentality quickly reminds you of the way the country came together in the weeks and months immediately following the attacks. Sadly, the polarization and division experienced in this country over the past couple years only adds to the poignancy of the story.

If there's such a thing as a feel-good comeuppance, then the previously unpublished "Fucking Justice" certainly fits the bill. In it, Roger Taney—the Chief Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court who wrote the odorous *Dred Scott* decision stating that all blacks, including free blacks, could never become United States citizens—receives a punishment fitting the black mark he placed on American judicial history. The term "fucking" is appropriate given the context of the story, in which a secret, mystical society puts Taney through a ritualistic trial shortly after his swearing ceremony in order to ascertain what type of Justice he will be. This ordeal leads one reviewer on Amazon.com calls the piece "a shameful piece of character assassination," and surely there is no proof that Taney engaged in anything like this act in real life. However, in a satirical examination of what type of justice is appropriate for a man who took such an inhuman stand, the act in question is certainly a metaphor for his *Scott* decision. It also makes the conclusion of the story, not to mention the title itself, much more apropos.

The next moralist fable in the book is a brief play, the previously unpublished "The Zombies of Montrose" (two other stories, "Dr. Sarcophagus" and "Director's Cut" are also short, one-act plays.) In contrast to "Auspicious Eggs" and "Fucking Justice," "Zombies" employs a much lighter satirical tone. In it, Morrow tackles the plight of the working poor by showing examples of people

who honestly couldn't survive without the help of Arabelle, a voodoo practitioner living in Montrose, Pennsylvania, and the zombies she loans to them. Her assistance, which is jokingly called "metaphysical socialism," "dialectical materialism" and the almost blatantly obvious "voodoo economics," has drawn the ire of the area's rich and elite, who managed to convince the town council to form a Public Safety Committee to ostensibly look into the safety of these zombies, which in their off-time have a penchant for reading philosophy by writers such as Kant, Descartes, Hegel & Nietzsche. Thankfully for the people she helps, Arabelle finds a way to bring the Committee around to her side, and the story ends with her suggesting a way for the audience to engage in more charity and volunteerism in helping the poor.

Morrow follows "Zombies" by closing the collection with the title story. Part *Animal Farm* and part *Island of Dr. Moreau*, "The Cat's Pajamas" is by far the most unusual story in the collection. In it, Vickie and Blake, a couple of liberal teachers in a long-term co-habitative relationship from New Jersey, decide to get married and take a summer road trip. On their way through Greenbriar, Pennsylvania get waylaid by Dr. Andre Pollifex, a scientist working to create the perfect idealists. Unfortunately, to do so he splices humans with farm animals, as well as kidnaps Blake and forces him to undergo a surgical procedure that leaves his brain floating in a jar (but securely tethered to his

body) in order to easily extract an incredibly rare genetic component in order to create a serum necessary to the process. Vickie and Blake eventually succumb to Dr. Pollifex's vision, with Vickie going so far as to allow herself to be spliced with a hen. She and other mutants form the Common Sense Party and run for local election to make the town "the most livable community in America." Interestingly, they start gaining the support of the local populace, but they are up against some incredibly powerful economic forces that decide to end the threat they represent once and for all. Ultimately, despite some wonderful ironies, absurdities, humor and imagery, "The Cat's Pajamas" lacks the impact of many of its predecessors in the collection. Furthermore, the ending, while well within the bounds of the material, feels unsatisfying.

Overall, *The Cat's Pajamas* makes for entertaining reading. At times the moralizing comes across as heavy-handed, but satire, by its very nature, fervently advocates opinions, so the sin is forgivable. The shifting tones of the various stories offset the fact that in a couple scenarios Morrow addresses material he handled before. Nonetheless, many long-time fans will certainly applaud his skewering of some favorite targets once again. A couple of the offerings in *Cat's Pajamas* lack the impact of the majority of his work, but as a whole the collection shows why Morrow's efforts continue to receive praise from the sf community and why he ranks as a leading satirist within it.

Letter to the Editor

Hey, just read the first issue of *Some Fantastic* and rather enjoyed it. I would tend to agree with *MacAddict* on Light Sabers and Chewbacca, if only for the fact that Scotty didn't have a song about him in the movie *Clerks*, nor a successful defense made around him on *South Park*.

I gotta say that the measuring stick I use to judge all B-Films is *Mant!*, the movie within *Matinee* starring John Goodman. It's every cliché in the history of bad film. I once tried to raise funds to actually make it, but it never happened. A close second is *Hudson Hawk*. Not quite SF, but close (actually, it's got a rich vein of SteamPunk running through it) and it's one of those films that you know is bad, but you can't help but love every frame. And James Coburn, Richard E. Grant and David Coruso are all in it!

Good stuff,
Chris Garcia
garcia@computerhistory.org

Editor's Note: I saw *Hudson Hawk* in the movie theater in the summer of 1990 on a first date—which was an appropriate portent for our potential relationship. Even though I blocked out nearly all the movie from my memory, I seem to recall the SteamPunk vein running through it, and I am a little surprised I didn't recognize it myself at that time. I'll mark this down as something to check out again in the future.