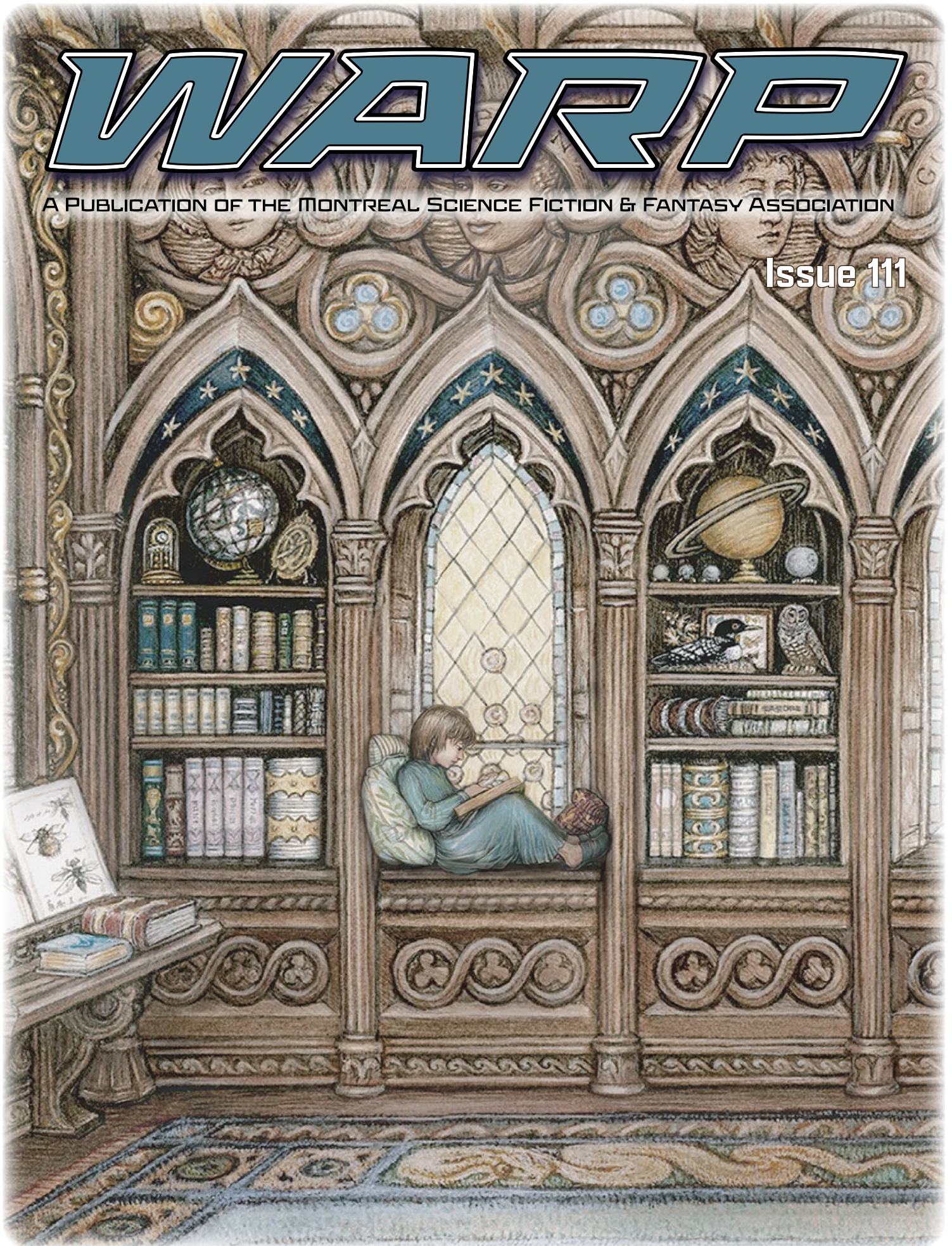


WARP

A PUBLICATION OF THE MONTREAL SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY ASSOCIATION

Issue 111



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On the Cover



Rasa's Library, by award-winning artist and writer Ingrid Kallick, whose work was exhibited at this year's World Fantasy Con at the Hotel Bonaventure. Her illustrations have also appeared in *Cricket Magazine*, *Communication Arts*, the *Spectrum Fantastic Arts Annual 20*, *Scientific American*, and on the cover of *Science*, as well as in textbooks, advertising, and print design. WARP would like to gratefully acknowledge her generosity in permitting us to feature it on this month's cover.

To learn more or purchase her work, visit her website at <https://ikallick.com>. You can also find her on Instagram, Facebook, Youtube, Redbubble, and Patreon.

MonSFFA Calendar of Events

All in-person meetings are cancelled until further notice. Programming will be posted on our website and Facebook page a week or two ahead of the virtual meeting. Invitations to Zoom are sent to members and friends about a week before the meeting. Meetings are held on the second Saturday of each month.

Stay safe and follow us on the internet!

Website: www.monsffa.ca

Facebook: www.facebook.com/MonSFFA

The Fine Print: WARP is a quarterly publication of the Montreal Science Fiction and Fantasy Association, a nonprofit organization of fans interested in sharing their love of science fiction and fantasy. The opinions expressed in WARP are those of the individual writers and do not necessarily reflect those of MonSFFA or the editor. To reprint any article, please contact us first. The use of copyrighted material is generally discouraged, but sometimes unavoidable: our apologies to the copyright holders, no serious infringement is intended. This is an amateur production, and your tolerance is appreciated by your fans.

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Letters to the Editor

Dear MonSFFen:

It's a mad, rush job! It's crazy time for me right now, but with deadline immanent, here goes with a quick letter of comment on WARP 110.

Our friend, Sylvain. There are few of us who have been untouched by this terrible pandemic, and we have all been touched by Sylvain's passing. Perhaps we didn't say enough at the end of the article. He always prepared amazing graphics, often steampunk in theme, to mark our birthday and anniversaries. He often sent us pictures from the Worldcons we couldn't get to. There is a terrible hole in our lives where Sylvain was, and no else I know will ever fill it. Our condolences and greetings to brother Marc.

With the omicron variant of COVID-19 quickly becoming the dominant strain, it's wise that events are being cancelled. Did you have your book sale and Holiday Feast? A shame you didn't and also good thing you didn't. I hope 2022 will not be postponed or cancelled the way 2020 and 2021 were. We don't need a third year of pandemic.

We did catch COVID-19 early 2021, and we recovered from it; we also got our first and second COVID shots, and a flu shot as well, can't hurt. We are now looking into our booster shots. We need as much in our defences as we can get. It is cold outside, but all of our snow is gone. I am hoping that the WorldVision work will return in 2022, but I have yet to hear from the gentleman who got the contract in 2019. *Amazing Stories* magazine is on hiatus right now, and as of this

moment, I am about 30% into editing a 500-page SF book. It is keeping me busy, and away from responding to fanzines.

I do remember *The Starlost*, and the terrible fallout after the show was broadcast, and largely forgotten. This is a great article Keith has written, and the only thing I might add to it was that much of the weaponry on the show, such as it was, was produced by Toronto fan and weapons maker Phill Stephens. Phill was a burly Klingon at many conventions in the 70s, and who knows where his career could have gone...he died of an epileptic seizure in the early 70s, can't remember when. We did hope that the *Starlost* fiasco wouldn't hurt that beginning career...we'll never know.

More of Sylvain...we both thought that as he retired, he'd become kind of a Hercule Poirot character, regularly taking his tisane. He died one year from retirement...he was terribly robbed of the relative relaxation of retirement, even more not fair.

This might not be the kind of letter anyone wanted to read, but here it is. I believe he wouldn't want us to mourn too long, but keep having our SFnal fun, and I hope issue 111 is more uplifting, and more cheerful. We will see you then.

Yours,
Lloyd Penney

Editor's Note: Although Sylvain's passing was indeed tragic, he was fortunate enough to have taken early retirement a few years before the pandemic.



Issue 111

Winter 2021/22

Notice of MonSFFA Address Change

For the record, the club has changed its postal mailing address. Again!

Following the passing of MonSFFA treasurer Sylvain St-Pierre in March, we transferred mail from MonSFFA's long-time Boulevard Ste-Rose postal address temporarily to the home of club vice-president Keith Braithwaite in Chateaugay. With Joe Aspler now having accepted the position of club treasurer, we hereby inform our membership and friends that MonSFFA's new mailing address thus becomes, officially:

MonSFFA
c/o 29 rue Harold
Kirkland, Québec
H9J 1R7

Please address any and all postal mail, such as membership application or renewal forms and cheques, to this new Harold Street address. Should you have recently sent any mail to the temporary Chateaugay address, not to worry; correspondence already posted to and received at the Chateaugay address will be forwarded to the club's new address.

Please take note of this postal address change and update your address books and databases accordingly.

Sylvain St-Pierre's SF/F Collection Entrusted to Club

Would that we could accept this beneficence under happier circumstances, but fate has dealt the cards and MonSFFA has been entrusted with the sizable SF/F book, comics, and magazine collection of our late friend and sci-fi compatriot, Sylvain St-Pierre, who succumbed to COVID-19 earlier this year. Sylvain's brother, Marc, contacted the club's executive in recent months to inform us that Sylvain certainly would have wanted MonSFFA to take stewardship of his collection. In addition, Marc benevolently offered to facilitate our doing so.

In early October, we began the process of packing up, cataloguing, and storing until later allocation the collection, which we estimate to number well over 2000 SF/F books, magazines, and comics, some of these vintage periodicals dating back to the 1930s and '40s. While a variety of publications from paperbacks to coffee-table books make up the bulk of the collection, there are also included a number of items like collectible card sets, figurines, and art prints.

Desiring to be certain of respecting as much as possible what we understand were Sylvain's wishes, we have consulted closely with Marc and are committed to proceeding in accordance with his guidance. Further details to follow as the lengthy process of cataloguing the collection continues.

Meanwhile, on behalf of the club, MonSFFA's Executive wishes to acknowledge and thank Marc for his magnanimous assistance as we began this monumental undertaking, and for

the generous monetary donation he has made to MonSFFA in memory of his dear, departed brother.

No In-Person Club Meetings Until 2022

We have received notice that the hall we propose to rent for future in-person MonSFFA meetings will not be available until 2022, no specific date given. As such, we will not be resuming a regular in-person meeting schedule this year, as we had hoped. The continuing COVID-19 pandemic again vexes our plans!

Summer 2021 proved not as much a return to pre-COVID conditions as had been originally anticipated, with the Delta variant spurring a rise in case numbers during the warm-weather months after they had fallen precipitously early in the year. Everyone had been looking forward to a "normal" season of sun and fun as Public Health restrictions were eased or dropped altogether, only to find that the pandemic remained very much an ongoing concern.

The numbers again began to decline as fall arrived and we did not see the kinds of major spikes in cases that we had during past outbreaks, so we adopted a cautiously optimistic stance. No doubt the high percentage of eligible fully-vaccinated citizens—as of this writing, over 87 percent in Québec, 84 percent in Canada as a whole—has been a principal factor in slowing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Despite occasional ups and downs, the situation seemed to be improving, just at a slower pace than had been initially projected by authorities.

But now the numbers are again on the rise and a new variant, designated "Omicron," has manifested out of South Africa and is precipitating concern. *Sigh.*

May 2021 MonSFFA e-Meeting



Humour was the thematic focus of our May 8 e-meeting, with Joe Aspler's "Comedy, Parody, and Puns in F&SF," the principal presentation of the afternoon. Citing *National Lampoon's* "Bored of the Rings," in print for over 50 years and considered the most successful of science fiction and fantasy parodies, Joe continued with *Mad Magazine's* many SF/F parodies—"The Ring and I,"

"Star Blecch"—Hollywood fare like Mel Brooks' *Spaceballs* and the *Star Trek* spoof *Galaxy Quest*, as well as television shows like *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *Red Dwarf*, and *Third Rock From the Sun*.

The unintentional humour of low-rent 1950s sci-fi "classic"

Plan 9 from Outer Space was covered, too, as was unrepentant punster Isaac Asimov, along with other name genre writers who just couldn't resist a good—or bad!—pun. Silliness abounds in *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes*, while fan-made productions like the seminal *Hardware Wars* and, of course, MonSFFA's own *Plant Nine From Outer Space*, were acknowledged, too.

Finally, science-based jokes and the oft-employed SF references to be found in the scientific field were highlighted, some of these having been slipped into actual scientific papers authored by real scientists, including a number Joe himself featured in his retirement seminar in 2016.

After the mid-meeting break, appended with a Zoom show-and-tell segment for the club's scale modellers, Keith Braithwaite offered a brief episode guide for what many would consider an opus of unintentional humour, the ill-fated 1970s Canadian sci-fi TV series *The Starlost*. This series was ultimately spurned by its very creator, Harlan Ellison, and has been mercilessly ridiculed ever since it first aired, and for good reason, might we add! The show's science consultant, SF author Ben Bova, later wrote *The Starcrossed*, a thinly disguised fiction based on his and Ellison's experiences on the series, which Joe also mentioned in his presentation.

The whole virtual meeting was bracketed by Keith's compilation of *Star Wars*-themed, cheesy dad jokes—how does a Jedi Knight open a PDF file?... Using Adobe Wan Kenobi!

June e-Meeting

Montreal's celebrated hockey team was enjoying win after win as the playoffs progressed in what would prove an ultimately unsuccessful run for a coveted 25th Stanley Cup. MonSFFA jumped on the Habs bandwagon with a meeting-opening trivia game, just for the fun of it, asking participants to list 25 science fiction or fantasy feature films set, at least in part, on an ice planet, or during the winter. We posted our choices at the conclusion of the meeting.

Our lead presentation covered the career, and showcased the art of industrial designer/concept artist Syd Mead, whose visions of sleek, futuristic vehicles and the vast cityscapes of a technological future established the visual template for many a sci-fi film during the 1980s and beyond, not the least of which was Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. Mead's gouache-on-board illustrations of this Jetsons-come-to-life future, particularly those produced for U.S. Steel in the 1960s, really put him on the map as a "visual futurist." But he most notably worked as a designer of concept cars for the American automobile industry during the '60s, and eventually made his way to Hollywood, there producing conceptual art for such film productions as *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*, *Aliens*, Disney's *TRON*, and the aforementioned *Blade Runner*, as well as this neo-noir sci-fi classic's sequel, *Blade Runner 2049*.

The mid-meeting break saw a spiffy WARP 110 officially

released, this being the first issue published under the new editor/designer team of Danny Sichel and Valerie Royall.

Joe Aspler was up next with a pub crawl of sorts, detailing the various bars, saloons, clubs, and lounges frequented by the many characters of science fiction and fantasy literature, film, and television. Folk followed Joe on a guided tour of *Star Trek's* Ten Forward and Quark's Bar, among other of *Trek's* watering holes; *Star Wars's* Mos Eisley Cantina, lousy with scum and villainy; and The Winchester Tavern, where Shaun and company planned to have a pint and wait out the zombie apocalypse!

Arthur C. Clarke's The White Hart is an establishment in which Harry Purvis spins extraordinary yarns in the style of Irish writer Lord Dunsany's "club tales." Clarke's fictional pub was apparently based on a real public house where London's science fiction fans gathered weekly until the mid-1950s.

The literary construct of tall tales told in taverns was not new in 1926, when Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18th Baron of Dunsany introduced readers to barfly Joseph Jorkens, who, in exchange for whiskey, would recount wild stories of adventure for the amusement of his fellow tippers. What was new to the form was Lord Dunsany's infusion of a fantasy element to the tales; Jorkens' wife, for example, was a mermaid! Dunsany inspired other genre writers like J. R. R. Tolkien, Robert E. Howard, H. P. Lovecraft, and Clarke.

Tolkien's Middle Earth certainly included its share of inns, among them The Prancing Pony in Bree and The Green Dragon on the Bywater Road, but among the first gentlemen's club featured in a fantastical tale was London's Reform Club, whose membership list included one Phileas Fogg, and at which said fellow wagered that he could complete a journey *Around the World in Eighty Days*.

Joe touched on the many descendants of these early examples. The Silver Eel and The Golden Lamprey, for instance, are inns featured in Fritz Leiber's sword-and-sorcery world of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, while The Vulgar Unicorn is to be found in Robert Asprin's *Thieves' World* series. The Old Phoenix Inn is a magical nexus between parallel worlds where gather characters from Poul Anderson's fiction, The Mended Drum—originally The Drum, before it was rebuilt after a fire—is the most famous disreputable tavern on all of Terry Pratchett's Discworld, and the regulars at Callahan's Place include the extraterrestrials, time-travellers, and mythological beings of Spider Robinson's universe.

The Leaky Cauldron, Three Broomsticks, and Hog's Head, meanwhile, are all establishments in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books. Of more recent vintage, too, are Larry Niven's Draco Tavern and Jim Butcher's McAnally's Pub.

Who Framed Roger Rabbit's Ink and Paint Club and *SpongeBob SquarePants's* Salty Spitoon were also spotlighted, as was the classic Saturday morning cartoon character of Commander McBragg, a barroom raconteur if ever there was one!

A show-and-tell on Zoom followed, during which several



MonSFFen displayed and discussed their various “fancraft” projects. Lindsay Brown held her fellow club members rapt with a brief treatise on, and live demonstration of pyrography, the art of wood burning. She detailed the process, and the equipment and techniques she employs to etch/burn into wood beautifully rendered drawings.

July e-Meeting Welcomes Guest Speaker



The star attraction of MonSFFA’s July 10 e-meeting was guest speaker François Vigneault, a locally-based sci-fi cartoonist who joined us on Zoom to talk about his work and field questions from club members. François wrote and drew the graphic novel *Titan*, and outlined his influences and narrative approach to this socio-political sci-fi thriller set at Homestead Station, a huge mining colony on the moon Titan.

A freshly-arrived administrator from Earth tasked with increasing the operation’s productivity, João da Silva finds his new posting rife with tensions. The mine’s giant, genetically-engineered human workers, the Titans, are at odds with management.

Phoebe, a representative of the workers’ union, is liaison with the new manager. Despite their differences, the two form an amorous connection and must work together to find a way to bridge the differences between their two worlds, lest a developing rebellion spark solar system-wide calamity!

Science fiction is at its best when an allegory for present-day society. Addressed here are the issues surrounding capitalism, colonialism, and class differences, with both sides of the argument given their due—no one is without virtue or vice.

François’ bold art, rendered in stark black and white, with splashes of russet-pink—violet in the original French-language version—is at the same time Spartan and detailed, lending the work an appealing, eye-catching look.

François spoke, too, of his work as illustrator of the comedic comic book series *Orcs in Space*, and answered numerous questions posed by MonSFFen keen for insight into his creative process. It was interesting to hear the reasoning behind the artistic choices he made.

On this rather busy afternoon, our own Danny Sichel also gave an amusing, pun-peppered and entertaining talk on Zoom, his topic being “Shakespeare in Fantasy and SF,” an examination of the fantasy and even science fictional elements in Shakespeare’s many works, the Bard’s wide-ranging influence on SF/F, and his appearances as a character in genre stories. Originally advertised as “A Presentation in Four Acts,” Danny trimmed that down to three acts at the last minute in the interests of time, and because he also felt that two of the acts he had initially put together were similar enough to be combined.

The meeting’s agenda included, as well, Joe Aspler’s “Doctor Who’s Who,” a guide to the stage, film, and television roles played by the various actors, and one actress, prior to and after their runs as the Doctor on the venerable British sci-fi series. Example: shortly before his casting as the fourth Doctor, Tom Baker portrayed evil magician Prince Koura in Ray Harryhausen’s fantasy/adventure *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*. Many of these performers had in common Shakespearean roles, and a handful have appeared in other genre franchises like *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*. Also, tragically, both second Doctor Patrick Troughton and third Doctor Jon Pertwee suffered fatal heart attacks while attending a *Doctor Who* convention!

To deter the unwanted attention of entertainment journalists and fans, *Return of the Jedi* was famously disguised as a production called *Blue Harvest*, with fake merchandise fabricated to throw nosey types off the scent. Keith Braithwaite posted a list of the code names or working titles of well-known genre movies, challenging MonSFFen to correctly identify the films to which those names corresponded—*Star Beast*, for instance, was the working title for *Alien*. A second challenge put up by Keith required folk to match genre movie title to the work of short fiction that inspired the film—*Blade Runner* was based on Philip K. Dick’s “Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?” for example, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* on Harry Bates’ novella “Farewell to the Master.”

August e-Meeting

In celebration of the record 24 Olympic medals won by Canadian athletes at the just-concluded Summer Olympic Games in Tokyo, we opened our August 14 e-meeting programming with a quiz. Keith Braithwaite posted a list of 24 brief story synopses, with genre novels, graphic novels, short fiction, films, and television shows all represented. A second list of science fiction, fantasy, and horror titles followed, all of these including the word “summer,” a nod to both the season and the Tokyo games. The challenge proffered to MonSFFen was to correctly match synopsis to title.

Our main presentation of the afternoon was Joe Aspler’s “Invention is a Mother!” The old maxim tells us that “Necessity is the mother of invention,” but Joe asked, “Or is it?” Zeppelins, autogyros, rocket-packs, flying cars, fake leather, a zero-calorie fat substitute, the Betamax—a walk along the road of modern civilization finds the path strewn with the wreckage of failed inventions, and here, Joe reviewed some of the great, and not-so-great examples upon which we may gaze wistfully, or let out a giggle.

Sony’s Betamax video recording machine, for instance, was a solid effort, the first such device and a superior product compared to the VHS counterparts to which it lost out in the

marketplace. Sony's mistake was in refusing to licence their technology to other manufacturers, which rival JVC did with its system. As a result, the Betamax was soon surrounded by VHS machines on store shelves and quickly lost market share.

A pair of Venetian-blind sunglasses, meanwhile, providing no appreciable attenuation of brightness or any UV protection whatsoever, prompts us to ask WTF?—as useless as a screen-door on a submarine was this one!

Science fiction tropes like the flying car and rocket-pack, perhaps, inspired inventors to design and actually build these contraptions, and Joe showed video clips, permitting his audience a look at a few functioning—though not always terribly well—examples.

Also examined were those common features of the steampunk subgenre, the autogyro and ever-present airship. Autogyros were developed in the 1920s and '30s, but could not hover in place like a helicopter, or carry as heavy a load of cargo. They were largely abandoned in favour of the helicopter. The airship, or Zeppelin (named for its inventor, Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin), was a perfectly fine and impressive innovation in aviation but depended for lift on lighter-than-air and highly flammable hydrogen gas. The fiery crash of the giant German airship *Hindenburg* in 1937 pretty much closed the book on Zeppelins as a viable means of transportation, although helium-filled blimps continue to operate today.

Interestingly, super-spy James Bond, who has employed his share of high-tech devices, flew on screen a jet-pack (*Thunderball*), flying car (*The Man with the Golden Gun*), and autogyro (*You Only Live Twice*)! We might add that he also dangled from the mooring line of an airship over San Francisco (*A View to a Kill*).

In the 1930s, *Popular Science*, *Modern Mechanix*, and other such magazines flaunted numerous questionable inventions, like the Hurricane House, an aerodynamic, weather vane-like family residence that swivels in the wind, or the Endless Belt Subway, in which commuters easily step on and off of an arrangement of conveyor-belts operating non-stop beneath city streets, serving as a public transit system.



Joe touched on, as well, “Corfam,” DuPont’s water-repellent synthetic leather, used to make shoes. But it didn’t breathe like leather and consequently, customers complained of very hot feet! “Olestra” was Procter and Gamble’s zero-calorie fat substitute, which unfortunately caused in dieters anal leakage! And the short-lived “Smell-O-Vision” system allowed movie-goers to not only see and hear, but smell what was unfolding on the screen! It flopped because patrons complained of a distracting, noisy hiss as odors were released into the theatre. The gadget just plain didn’t work very well and was only used for one ignominious film.

The mid-meeting break segued into a planning session during which were solicited ideas for presentations and discussion topics for the remaining schedule of e-meetings, and for our eventual 2022 in-person club get-togethers. This took place primarily on Zoom, but those unable to join our video-chat were able to contribute by sending their suggestions to us via the message or e-mail options offered on MonSFFA’s Web site.

Our next post focused not on the fun, sun, sand, swimming, boating, backyard barbecues, and cooling refreshments of summer, but a rather less pleasant aspect of the season: bugs! At best, people are hands-off and at worst, actively loathe, fear, and stomp on these frisson-inducing creepy-crawlies, and our intrinsic uneasiness with bugs is not lost on sci-fi/horror film producers, who play on the discomfort we have with insects, arachnids, and slimy worms to script fright films in which spiders, ants, wasps, etc. serve as the scary monsters. A subset of the bug-as-monster movie is the giant-bug-as-monster movie!

In the 1950s, as the nuclear age dawned and atomic radiation became a ready explanation for all manner of terrifying mutation, genre filmmakers imagined proximity to atom-bomb test sites, or the consumption of food tainted by radio-active waste would be sufficient to transform the tiniest of insects into colossal beasts slaving for human flesh! Other explanations for the emergence of such mammoth creatures were equally improbable, but audiences of the day nevertheless swarmed movie theatres and drive-ins like ants to a picnic.

We offered, here, brief reviews of a list of “Big-Bug Movies” from the ’50s, the decade which pioneered and produced probably the best—and worst!—of the subgenre. Among our selections were *Them!*, *The Deadly Mantis*, *Attack of the Giant Leeches*, and *The Fly*. We included *Eight-Legged Freaks*, a 21st-century monster bug flick, because it is an homage to the classics of the ’50s.

Proceedings closed with the answers to Keith Braithwaite’s opening quiz posted, and a sign-off until next time.

MonSFFA Hosts “Virtual Picnic” in September

At the outset of the fourth wave of the pandemic, we had considered holding our annual summer barbecue-in-the-park in July. The gathering would be an outdoor event, after all, and we felt confident of reasonable safety for any fully vaccinated MonSFFA members who wished to attend. But as the COVID numbers rose dramatically with the advent of the fourth wave, and public facilities, notably washrooms, remained closed, we thought better of the proposal and decided to hold off until the end of summer, early fall. Little had improved by September, however, and we finally decided on what we termed a “Virtual Picnic.”

Folk were asked to prepare themselves a sandwich and

snacks, pour themselves a beverage, and join us on Zoom for this Virtual Picnic, slated for Saturday afternoon, September 11. We gave our team of presenters the day off and planned, simply, casual conversation as we enjoyed our lunch and opined back and forth on the latest in international, national, and local news, pop culture, and of course, SF/F and fandom. We scheduled only a single open discussion for the afternoon: “Speculations on a Post-Pandemic World.”



On this anniversary of another world-changing event, we asked what pandemic-wrought changes people thought might endure after the crisis abated, and whether we had already crossed a line from which there is no returning altogether to the way things were before COVID-19. Would frequent and thorough hand-washing remain a habit? Would we ever again shake hands as a greeting? Or ride a crowded subway? Or throng together indoors at a ComicCon or some such large-scale event?

MonSFFen offered conjecture on the post-pandemic world they believed would develop over the ensuing years: anxious about living in close proximity to others, many people would migrate from overcrowded cities to the roomier suburbs and small towns; telecommuting would become increasingly popular and eventually supplant busing into a downtown office job; and face masks might well stay with us, becoming something of a fashion accessory!

Some expressed apprehension about going to the movies again anytime soon, and ventured that in any case, COVID had enabled streaming to more quickly become established across a broad demographic and proliferate, and that this development would hamper the reopening of, and ultimately doom the local Cineplex. But others felt that once masking requirements and capacity limits were completely lifted from theatres, people would flock back to the movies, starved as we have all been for fresh, top-level entertainment and a communal experience. It was noted that should there arise a new reality in the coming years, Hollywood and the theatre business will have to adapt or die, just as did, in something of a come-back, the near-extinct drive-in during the pandemic, offering both entertainment and that communal experience coupled with the safety of isolation within one's car.

And finally, pretty much everyone worried about the future dangers posed by ardent anti-vaxxers and, generally, all anti-science, conspiracy-believing, ideologically-driven political extremists. While the pandemic did not give birth to

these militants, it certainly accelerated their rise to prominence. Lamented, too, was the apparent gross misunderstanding by many of the extent to which personal liberties may be extended in a free and democratic society—they are not limitless!—and an ignorance of the responsibilities that go hand in hand with those freedoms.

“It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government,” professed Churchill. But let's not forget the rest of his statement: “...except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.”

October's “Halloween” e-Meeting

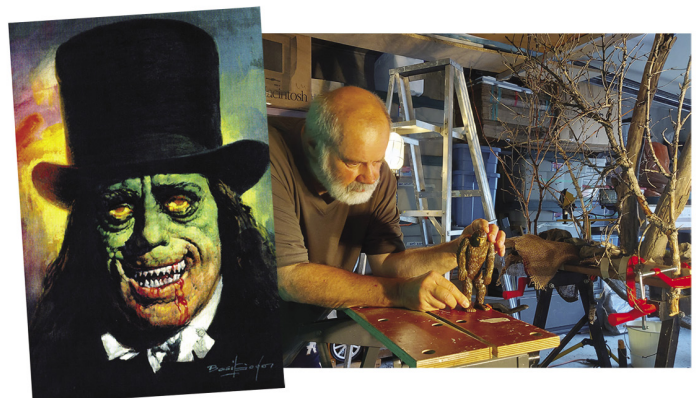
With Halloween looming, MonSFFA opened its October 16 virtual meeting with brief readings of sinister, scary, and shocking passages from horror literature. Each participant was asked to don a Halloween costume or mask, and dress their home Zoom “studio” with Jack-o-Lanterns, gravestones, and other such spookiness, perhaps illuminated by shadowy, atmospheric lighting. We credit club member Josée Bellemare with this appropriately eerie idea!

On the club's Web site, meanwhile, Keith Braithwaite posted a gallery of the classic movie-monster portraiture of horror artist Basil Gogos, known for the 50-odd covers he painted for Famous Monsters of Filmland magazine in the 1960s and '70s.

A Zoom-exclusive overview/discussion of the many films and television series featuring zombies was our main presentation of the afternoon, courtesy Valérie Bédard and guest panelist Mario Giguère, who offered a montage of zombie movie posters as they trumpeted the most celebrated, as well as the most execrable examples of this screen sub-genre.

The first zombie films, like 1932's *White Zombie* and the Val Lewton-produced *I Walked with a Zombie* in 1943, centered on the voodoo rituals of Haitian folklore but the template for the modern zombie movie was George A. Romero's 1968 classic *Night of the Living Dead*, which spawned numerous sequels and imitators in the ensuing decades, including *Return of the Living Dead*, *Teenage Zombies*, *28 Days Later*, *Resident Evil*, *Kung Fu Zombie*, *Tokyo Zombie*, *Train to Busan*, *Astro Zombies*, *Attack of the Moon Zombies*, *Zombie Nightmare*, *The Incredibly Strange Creatures Who Stopped Living and Became Mixed-Up Zombies*, *World War Z*, *Zombie Lake*, *Dead Snow*, *Overlord*, and the comedic *Shaun of the Dead*, *Juan of the Dead*, *Zombieland*, *Zombeavers*, and the Montreal-shot *Warm Bodies*.

Several exceptional Canadian entries were highlighted, like the unusual *Pontypool*, the rural Québec-set *Les Affamés*



(English title: *Ravenous*), and *Blood Quantum*, in which the Red Crow Reservation grapples with a zombie apocalypse that has afflicted all but First Nations people.

Zombies have plagued the small screen, as well, on shows like *I, Zombie*, *The Walking Dead*, and *Black Summer*.

The mid-meeting break was followed by a Zoom show-and-tell session, with Dan Kenney first detailing the process of kit-bashing his Klingon Dreadnought, followed by Keith Braithwaite's talk on and presentation of a short film he and his son had produced over the summer as something of a pandemic project.

Dan decided to soup-up his Bird of Prey after the model was damaged during transportation to a convention. He added additional phaser emplacements, photon torpedo tubes, and rebuilt the warp engines using parts from other kits, as well as bits and pieces found around the house.

Keith and his son's *Strange Mysteries* was shot to resemble a segment on an *Unsolved Mysteries*-type fictional TV show, the subject matter, here, being a roadside encounter with a Sasquatch. Keith took our Zoom audience through the prepping and filming of the production, which featured a stop-motion animation sequence, and served, too, as a test of commercially available home-hobbyist video compositing software.

Capping the meeting's presentations and accessible through both our Zoom and the club's Web site was Brian Knapp's virtual tour of the "Enchanted" exhibition at the Norman Rockwell Museum in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Subtitled "A History of Fantasy Illustration," this retrospective featured works by early fantasy illustrators and those more modern, from Gustave Doré, N. C. Wyeth, J. Allen St. John, Hannes Bok, and Virgil Finlay to Frank Frazetta, Boris Vallejo, Larry Elmore, Michel Whelan, and Anna Dittmann. The exhibit was divided into thematic sections, and Bryan covered, on this occasion, "The Hero's Journey" and "Good vs. Evil," with more to follow in the second part of his presentation, scheduled for the November 13 meeting.

A final Halloween tidbit was Keith Braithwaite's collection of "Two-Sentence Scares," culled from Reddit and designed to deliver one a chill, a shudder, a fright in but a handful of words. For instance: "My daughter's smiling face greeted me from the driveway as I returned home from a hard day at the office. My God, where is the rest of her?" Or: "The world was thrilled when it was announced that an all-female crew would pilot the first mission to Mars. The world was terrified three years later when they all returned, pregnant."

November e-Meeting

Just a couple days after Remembrance Day, and with the club's appreciation and commemoration of the war veterans and servicemen and -women of Canada's armed forces noted, we

hosted our November 13 e-meeting.

First at bat was Brian Knapp, who continued with his virtual tour of the Norman Rockwell Museum's "Enchanted: A History of Fantasy Illustration." The first half of the tour had unfolded last month, and we picked up right where we'd left off, Bryan covering today those sections of the exhibition devoted to "Mythology" and "Fairy Tales."

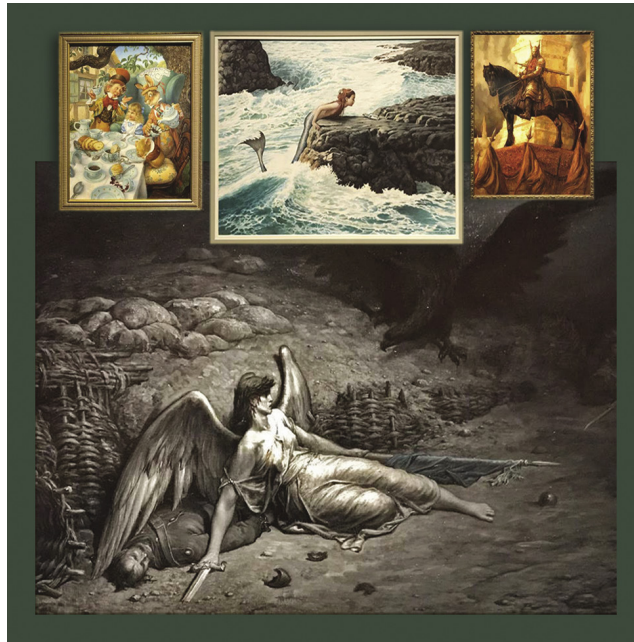
Beautiful paintings and drawings of Gods, Goddesses, dragons, knights, maidens, and faeries brought to life Greek, Roman, Celtic, Norse, and other mythologies, as well as the fantastical tales of Lewis Carroll, the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, and others. Contemporary variations on ancient legends were represented by superhero comic book cover art and illustrations for fantasy role-playing games like Dungeons and Dragons.

Brian covered, too, the fantastical elements present within museum namesake Norman Rockwell's depictions of an idealized America, and walked us through the exhibition's "Land of Enchantment" outdoor sculpture gallery, situated on the museum's grounds.

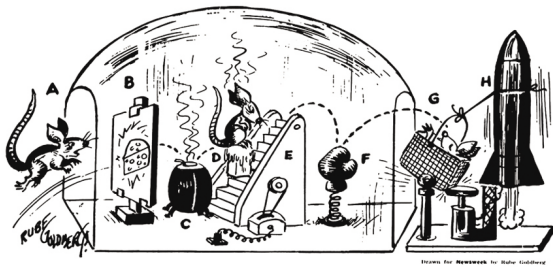
Joe Aspler followed with his presentation "Rube Goldberg Machines and the Fight Against the Nazis." Rueben Garrett Lucius Goldberg (1883-1970) was an American cartoonist best known for his diagrams of outlandishly complex chain-reaction mechanisms designed to perform rather simple tasks, perhaps best epitomized by the 1960s board game Mouse Trap. Joe highlighted some of Goldberg's crazy appliances, including the Self-Operating Napkin, Automatic Shaving Brush, and his most famous, and the inspiration for the popular board game, the Mousetrap! Goldberg's cartoons have inspired, too, an annual competition sponsored by Purdue University which challenges engineering students to build such elaborate Goldbergesque machines, and Joe provided video of some of the winning entries in action.

He also touched on science fiction writer Poul Anderson's amusing 1958 short novel *A Bicycle Built for Brew*, in which pressurized beer kegs are rigged to operate as a spaceship, snorting beer vapours out into space and thus providing thrust! Joe commented that "most science fiction inventions are Rube Goldberg machines." For instance, *Amazing Stories* editor Hugo Gernsback, who coined the term "science fiction" and was a pioneer in the field of amateur radio, invented Television Goggles, an actual, unwieldy gizmo that never went anywhere in the early 1960s but, arguably, anticipated modern VR goggles.

Rube Goldberg-like gadgets in China are called Chindogu, and are characterized more as useless contrivances rather than unnecessarily complex and overly engineered apparatuses. The British equivalent to Goldberg, meanwhile, was one William Heath Robinson (1872-1944), whose whimsically complicated devices—dubbed Heath Robinson contraptions—strongly influenced those featured in the stop-motion animated *Wallace and Gromit* films of today. Interestingly, the complex tape-punch machine that Britain's Bletchley Park intelligence



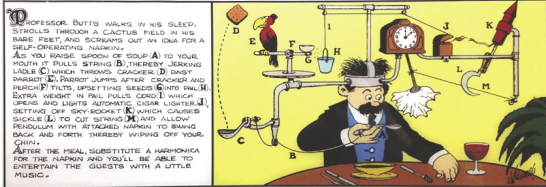
How to Get Rid of a Mouse



The best mousetrap by Rube Goldberg: Mouse (A) dives for painting of cheese (B), goes through canvas and lands on hot stove (C). He jumps on cake of ice (D) to cool off. Moving escalator (E) drops him on boxing glove (F) which knocks him into basket (G) setting off miniature rocket (H) which takes him to the moon.

Self-Operating Napkin

By Rube Goldberg



operatives used to help break Germany's top-secret Enigma/Ultra cipher in World War II was codenamed "Heath Robinson," and so here did Joe's promised connection to the fight against the Nazis come in.

Our mid-meeting break moved into a brief show-and-tell, and quick commentary on recent books read.

Keith Braithwaite's audio game was next and wound up the day's programming. Audio snippets of well-known quotations, catch-phrases, and sequences of dialogue gleaned from SF/F films or television series were played, and folk were challenged to identify the character speaking the words, the actor playing that character, *and* the movie or TV show in which the lines were spoken. But Keith threw in a twist! In Round One, he played the audio *backwards*, and in Round Two, at an *accelerated speed*, motivated by the famous "Backwards" episode of *Red Dwarf* and the fast-talking Scalosian's of *Star Trek's* "Wink of an Eye." The third round of the game simply asked players to identify by their distinctive screech or roar the Ray Harryhausen-created creature in question. Fortunately, Keith, a big fan of stop-motion animator Harryhausen's fantasy film oeuvre, had posted as a resource on our Web site in parallel to his Zoom-exclusive game a Ray Harryhausen Bestiary. To his surprise and delight, Keith's fellow MonSFFen were able to pick out accents, cadences, certain key words, and other clues to correctly identify a good number of the selections he had included!



We signed off with a promotional word concerning our upcoming 2021 holiday celebrations, and a final remembrance of those Canadian soldiers who have made the ultimate sacrifice in service to their country.

Thanks

With regard to all of the virtual get-togethers covered above, we thank for their involvement our presenters, discussion moderators, and supporting contributors, as well as those MonSFFen who helped to plan and run these online events. A special nod of appreciation for his participation is given our July-meeting guest speaker, François Vigneault, and zombie specialist Mario Giguère.

And, of course, we thank those MonSFFen and friends who visited the club's Web site or joined us on Zoom for these cyber-gatherings. We trust you were entertained, edified, and enjoyed your time with us, and we hope to welcome you back in future for more MonSFFA e-meetings, and eventually, one day, soon, when we return to normal, *hopefully* sometime early next year, to our in-person gatherings!

A Note from December's Contest Winner

So this afternoon I got a little envelope from François Vigneault, who was kind enough to provide MonSFFA a prize for the December meeting. I enjoyed the Zoom visual contest created by Keith and I was lucky enough to be the winner. Here are [some] photos of the prize package I received. My thanks to François for his kindness and generosity.

~Fernster



A Personal Remembrance of My Friend Sylvain

Keith Braithwaite

(I originally submitted this note for inclusion as part of the memorial section devoted to Sylvain St-Pierre last issue—*WARP 110*, Spring 2021—but unfortunately, it got lost in the e-mail shuffle somehow and didn't make it into that issue. My thanks to our editor for including it here, now, as I did want to pay tribute to a dear departed friend.)

Sylvain St-Pierre and I are both children of the late 1950s—he was just two years my senior—and we first met in the early 1990s through **MonSFFA**. We had grown up during the Quiet Revolution and the Trudeau era, that being Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, not his son, the current office holder. Sylvain and I held in our memory banks many of the same touchstones of youth and early adulthood. We read comic books as youngsters, watched old science fiction films and monster movies on TV, as well as series like the original *Star Trek*. We watched coverage, too, of the first moon landing, live as it was happening! And in our high school years, we devoured SF novels by genre stars Verne, Wells, Burroughs, Asimov, Clarke, and others.

Our friendship was initially kindled by a shared interest in science fiction and only enhanced by our mutual knowledge of, and appreciation for the works of genre notables from Poe and Lovecraft to Heinlein and Bradbury; filmmakers from George Pal to George Lucas; and artists like Bonestell, Finlay, Kelly Freas, Hergé, Uderzo, Alex Toth, and Alex Raymond. We shared a fondness for the likes of *Ultraman*, *Thunderbirds*, *The Twilight Zone*, and the Batman TV series of the mid-'60, in all of its campy brilliance. More recently, we both howled in laughter at comedies like *Galaxy Quest* and *The Lost Skeleton of Cadavera*, our familiarity with *Star Trek* fandom and vintage, low-budget, cheesy sci-fi B-movies no doubt serving to enrich for us the experience.

We were both avid collectors of SF/F memorabilia and our wide-ranging interests were remarkably similar, not that we were always into exactly the same things. Each had his own unique sci-fi passions, and thus did we learn from each other. Sylvain, for example, introduced me to the beautifully illustrated Belgian graphic novel series *Les Cités obscures*, a favourite of his. He was, in fact, a pioneering member of that particular fandom, and in the late-1990s, even created the authoritative online reference source devoted to the series. His *Dictionnaire obscur* subsequently formed the basis of the contemporary Altaplana.be site, which today hosts the Internet's most comprehensive encyclopedia of material related to the series and its authors. For my part, I conveyed to Sylvain in abundant detail way more than he probably ever wanted to know about the works of master stop-motion animator Ray Harryhausen, although of course, he was certainly well aware of Harryhausen's important contributions to fantasy cinema.

Another hobby we shared was home videography. Both

Sylvain and I were early adopters of then top-end home video systems (I remain eternally grateful for the lovely wedding video he produced for Colleen and I when we tied the knot). Since my teenaged years have I been interested in filmmaking and visual effects, envisioning and planning sci-fi film projects rather more ambitious than were possible at the time given the limited resources I had at my disposal. **MonSFFA** allowed me to finally have a go, and Sylvain, who had produced numerous shorts and video-souvenirs of SF/F conventions and the like, complete with nifty animated titles and computer graphics, was on board as a collaborator. I remember spending many a weekend ensconced in his home studio in Laval editing footage, and creating computer-generated title sequences and animated special effects using his old Amiga "Video Toaster." Time spent on those **MonSFFA** projects was among the happiest, most rewarding I've enjoyed as a member of this club, and Sylvain was right there with me for all of it.

When Colleen and I first heard confirmation of his death, we found it difficult to believe that Sylvain was gone, so suddenly, so unexpectedly. And that his elderly mother, who he had been caring for at home, succumbed as well, within days of his passing, was tragic beyond words. We began to recall countless **MonSFFA** meetings, sci-fi conventions, dinner parties, barbecues, and so many other wonderful times spent in his company over some 30 years of friendship. Colleen loved the charmingly accented timbre of his voice and described him simply as "a class act." And indeed, he was the proverbial gentleman and scholar, an unfailingly kind, generous, polite, and cultured man not adverse to a little silliness and fun for its own sake. As any **MonSFFA**n who has relished one of Sylvain's entertaining, comprehensively researched, and learned A/V presentations can attest, he was an artistic fellow, creative, and keen to share his enthusiasm for SF/F with other aficionados.

I think I shall most feel his absence when we eventually return to a post-pandemic world and gather again in person for a club meeting at which he will not be present. Nor will he be joining us for our usual post-meeting dinner at a restaurant downtown, something in which I know he took great pleasure. Sylvain St-Pierre has been a fixture at **MonSFFA**'s gatherings almost since day one, and it's heartbreaking to think that we will never again delight in one of his slideshow/video presentations, or read a piece he'd written for *Warp*... Or hear his cheerful greeting as we walk into a meeting... Or share with him a laugh... Or ever again see him...

Our sorrow becomes unbearable, for we have lost too many loved ones this past 18 months.

I will miss you terribly, my treasured friend; Rest in Peace.



CANADIAN FAN SYLVAIN ST-PIERRE
(B . 1956) , MARCH 25 , 2021

AUTHOR: BEVERLY CLEARBY

Sylvain's name on the memorial scroll at WorldCon 2021

Screen capture by Danny Sichel

Fiction: *Starfleet Treachery*

By Barbara Silverman

The story so far: When the *USS Explorer* pursued Chakotay and his ship of Maquis rebels, the *Val Jean*, into the Badlands Nebula, both ships were abruptly teleported to the other side of the galaxy, and many of *Explorer's* crew members were killed – but not, as in the universe we know with *Voyager*, the first officer Commander Cavit or the medical officer Dr. Fitzgerald. Without those high-level openings in *Explorer's* hierarchy, Captain Janeway cannot offer that position to Chakotay, or relegate all medical work to the EMH... and events begin to play out differently. **PREVIOUSLY:** Janeway destroys the Array, enraging the Kazon ships, who open fire.

CHAPTER 55

“Shields down to sixty percent,” Tuvok calmly called out as the ship withstood another round of Kazon fire.

Cavit leaned over in his chair. “Captain, we’re badly outnumbered,” he said to Janeway. “I suggest retreating.”

So far both ships had been holding their own, but Janeway knew they couldn’t do so indefinitely. “I agree, Mr. Cavit, we do need to end this!”

Leaning one elbow on the armrest she rubbed a hand along her chin, studying the battle scene playing out before her. “Tuvok, bring the other tricobalt on-line. Tom, I want a clear shot at the largest battleship.”

Paris promptly tapped commands into his panel. “Yes ma’am!”

“On-line.” The Vulcan’s hand poised over his controls.

Tom tried to maneuver into position. Again and again Kazon fire struck the ship, causing it to buck and tremble like a cyclone – and preventing a clear shot.

“Shields down to fifty percent,” Tuvok announced from the tactical station.

The shaking worsened, and Janeway grabbed the arms of her command chair with both hands to keep from being thrown to the floor. “Tom! I want that clear shot!”

Desperately Paris attempted to maneuver the ship into position. “I’m trying, Captain!”

Alongside *Voyager*, the *Val Jean* began firing on the Kazon ships, its phasers and photon torpedoes taking several of the smaller vessels out of commission. Phaser and torpedo fire from Chakotay’s ship took several of the smaller vessels out of commission, putting a hole in the Kazon defenses.

The Kazon battleship turned its attention on the Maquis, and Paris skillfully exploited the opportunity to guide the *Explorer* into place.



Janeway had her chance. “Fire!”

Seconds later the battleship was no more. The surviving Kazon turned their attention on the Starfleet vessel, but Tom’s expert piloting prevented the Kazon from inflicting heavy damage, while allowing the *Explorer* to hammer away at its enemy.

Chakotay turned his attention onto the other battle cruiser. In short order Maquis expertise inflicted heavy damage.

Calmly Tuvok announced, “Shields down to forty percent.”

“Damn!” Janeway knew her ship was never built to withstand such steady pounding. Rising from her chair, the captain walked over to a display monitor at the rear of the bridge.

Another direct hit!

The ship rolled, smoke and sparks flew out from the panel where Janeway was standing. Without warning the section exploded, sending the captain to the deck where she lay unmoving.

Cavit jumped to his feet. “Take the Captain to sickbay!”

As two of the crew rushed to carry out his orders, the first officer took the captain’s seat. “Evasive pattern Delta four.”

No match for Maquis and Starfleet training, and without the aid of the two large battleships, little by little the Kazon defenses began to weaken.

When Chakotay destroyed the last battle cruiser, the other Kazon ships broke off the attack.

Cavit walked over to Tuvok. “Cancel red alert, keep a close watch in case the Kazon return. You have the bridge, I’ll be down in sickbay.”





CHAPTER 56

When Cavit entered sickbay he found Dr. Fitzgerald tending to the unconscious captain. “How bad is it?”

Fitzgerald turned to the first officer. “Very bad. I’ve healed the first-degree burns to her hands and face, but the captain had suffered major brain damage. For starters... she has a severe concussion, tearing of nerve tissue, and multiple contusions. As well as general trauma injuries to the rest of her body. Probably quite a lot of organ damage.”

He grabbed another instrument from the tray near his right elbow, and glared at Cavit. “Don’t look at me like that. What do you expect me to do? Half of my equipment is off-line. This is the only bio-bed with medical readouts that are working! If we were back in the Alpha Quadrant, maybe we’d be able to save her. Here, under these conditions... well, I’m doing what I can. Which isn’t much.”

Cavit snarled. “Oh, you didn’t hear? We’re not going back. She destroyed the Array. Probably that Maquis outlaw had a hand in it.”

The doctor turned back to his patient. “I heard, yes. And I agree – Chakotay was behind her decision. That traitor would do anything to avoid returning to prison. Here, there’s no Starfleet to stop him.”

For several moments Fitzgerald moved the small diagnostic scanning wand around Janeway’s head. “I’ve done all I can. I’m sorry.”

He closed the medical tricorder with a snap. “I don’t see any chance of recovery. Her injuries are too severe. I expect death to be within three to four hours. Perhaps sooner.”

Cavit looked down at his captain. His eyes showed not sorrow, but decisiveness. He turned to the doctor. “Come with me!” he said, and strode into the doctor’s office, where he sat in the doctor’s chair. Fitzgerald followed him.

“So,” Cavit said. “Your thoughts on this whole situation?

Speak freely?”

The doctor growled. “If that damn Maquis had stayed in prison where he belongs, none of this would have happened. It’s Janeway’s own fault for forming an alliance with that traitor. It was her responsibility, as a captain, to place the welfare of the crew as a whole over Harry Kim. He’s only one person. She should have concentrated on getting us back to the Alpha Quadrant.”

Wrath briefly flickered across Cavit’s face. “I fully agree that the Captain was wrong, and definitely something has to be done about the Maquis. Janeway is totally incompetent. At Syzygie, we had the firepower to completely destroy them. Two tricobalts, and she let their ship escape. She had no business destroying the Array! I was this close to relieving her of duty and stopping her. But Tuvok and Chakotay were both on the bridge. I would have been outnumbered, and she’d have called it mutiny.”

He glanced at the bio-bed and its patient. “With Janeway incapacitated, I am now in command. If she is officially declared close to death with no chance of surviving, I then have the right, due to the extreme situation we are in, to become full captain, not just acting captain. Do I have your support?”

The doctor’s fist clenched. “Absolutely! I don’t want Chakotay in prison, I want him dead! What do you have in mind?”

Cavit smiled. “That may in fact happen. Here’s what I propose.”



Fiction: *First Spaceship on Venus: A Golden Age Story*

By Paul Gareau

The next chapter of "Space Voyage" by Paul Gareau is currently being reconstructed from its original typewritten manuscript. In its place, we present his story "First Space Ship on Venus".

He was pronounced fit and ready. Space cadet Tom Kilroy prepared to slide into his space suit and board the rocket XM-5 which was equipped for interstellar exploration, the kind he had heard rumours of while in military training. He had bid goodbye to his wife and son, and now watched tensely on a video screen as the ground crew went through the last phases of his present installation. The aim of the project on which he had been closely briefed was ostensibly to reach via rocket beyond the outer reaches of what scientists and astronomers know as our present solar system.

Venus was the true objective and a plan had been graded following certain stages. Red alert was reserved strictly for emergencies. The pilot and co-pilot would bring along only bare necessities. If there was any poetry out there, thought Tom, if only the planet allowed for plant life, he would carry home a flower.

A bell, an alert sounded in the Cape Canaveral afternoon. Tom knew what that meant. Now he tensed his muscles, pushed the visor of his bubbled space helmet, as he made his way precariously into the rocket chamber. Countdown, that eminent moment which astronauts anticipate more than anything, was

9, 8, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 ... 0

Rocket ship XM-5 took off with a world-shattering "RRRRRR" as its engines roared. Inside, assisted by the robot Phan, Tom Kilroy took hold of flight control...

He was in the stratosphere, high up above the world, when he peered through the observation dome and caught a glimpse of Venus like some giant bull's eye staring at him from the vacuum of outer space. Venus... the green planet... 2nd planet from the sun, closest planet to the Earth... His flight was America's first attempt at Venusian exploration. He marvelled at the trajectory as the ship pierced through a cloud of elemental moon dust! ... His thoughts, he knew, could streak through the heavens at infinite speed, but it would take the ship all of three months to reach its planned destination. Soon he and his co-pilot would reach a sort of equilibrium.

Tom remembered the time spent in training for the space mission, for the long hours spent in simulated conditions such as floating in a sensory deprivation tank... True, the preparations for his installation, the attention to detail, had been arduous conditions on the whole, but he was grateful for the scientists behind the tests, for his colleagues, and for his fellow trainees. It was then, at the cusp of his travel from and beyond Earth that he fell into a rare, blessed instant of bliss and thought of his wife and little family... Infinity's eye staring at him from the hub...

Not to be caught unawares, his eyes glued to the maze-like electronic panel before him, in a moment of total recall of

what he had left behind him, he steered bravely on, whispering all the while a silent prayer. He felt the presence of God cradling him and guiding him in his space bubble, took pains to do his best in the precarious confines of the rocket chamber – that projectile, that veritable objet volant which streaked forth into eternity, in the void of outer space.

"May the Force be with me!" he said to himself, and smiled.

Planet Venus – 5.474 million miles out from Earth – was fast coming into view... Tom was about 5.461 million miles out. His cosmic radio crackled. "Earth base to Kilroy. Earth base to Kilroy. Come in, Kilroy. We are following you on remote sensing. Beware the residue of a recent coronal mass ejection. Again, watch for gasses. Attention: objective lies ahead, the planet Venus!!!"

Hours later, the XM-5 landed, and Tom Kilroy became the first human on Venus. Giant molecular clouds, lowlands with a thick atmosphere, dead volcanoes, craters, Ishtar Terra and Aphrodite Terra, plateaus on the scale of continents, Venus's atmosphere and characteristics are the closest approximate to our Earth, though because of the equatorial heat, its climate is inhospitable to humans.

Came the moment when Tom carefully exiting XM-5, still wearing his space suit. He began to wander, exploring the sights of this strange new world.

Soon he came upon a stele, then some half-abandoned battlements. Everywhere he looked, he saw war-blasted landscape and no-longer-operating machines. Fires smoldered in the distance. He realized that he had found a whole civilization that had consumed and wrecked itself to the bitter end!

About to pick up a crystalline specimen from the ground in order to collect and later label, identify and catalogue it carefully, he also came upon a wanderer like himself, a lonely survivor: the last man – or alien – to live on this green, luminescent planet.

"They are all dead," the Venusian said. "They all killed each other, and themselves. It was because of the heat, and because an inter-planetary rivalry took hold of their interests and also because of later bombardment from the sun."

"Gamma ray emissions from solar flares?" asked Tom.

"Yes!" the latter answered. Tom decided to baptize his new-found cohort and friend "SOHO!" More advanced in language than Earthmen, he communicated to Tom through binary code. Despite the gaining atmospheric pressure, Tom decided to take him home with him back to planet Earth where he would no doubt be MOST WELCOME! "Come with me, Soho!"

And then lo! They held the hands of friendship together!



Essay: A Fresh Look at “Cold Equations”

By Danny Sichel

The latest *Clarkesworld* is out, and it includes “The Cold Calculations” by Aimee Ogden, most recent in a string of answer stories to Tom Godwin’s 1954 “The Cold Equations” – from “The Cold Solution” (Don Sakers, 1991), to “The Cold Crowdfunding Campaign” (Cora Buhlert, 2020), and many others with less obvious titles.

“The Cold Equations” — also known as the “throw the girl out the airlock” story — has long been criticized for multiple shortcomings, in both its themes and its content. The situation is contrived! The society is broken! The EDS is bad engineering! There are other things Barton could have thrown out! Many people have complained about this last one, incidentally. There are indeed items on board that could very well have been sacrificed (including, as in Sakers’ story, the legs of both the pilot and the stowaway, which Sakers’ pilot assumed could be re-grown); apparently Damon Knight came up with a whole list.

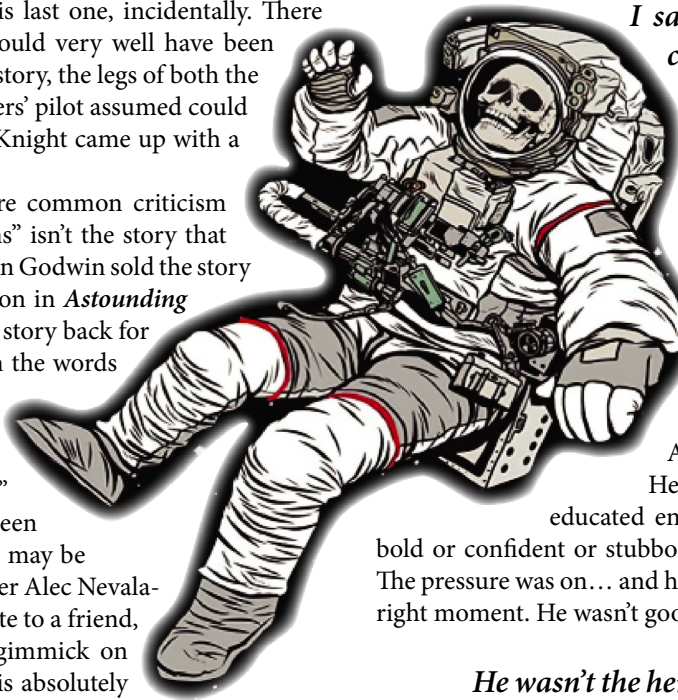
Lately, though, a far more common criticism has been that “The Cold Equations” isn’t the story that Tom Godwin wanted to write. When Godwin sold the story to John W. Campbell for publication in *Astounding Science Fiction*, Campbell sent the story back for rewrites three times, because — in the words of Joseph L. Green, who spent five days with Campbell in 1970 — “Godwin kept coming up with ingenious ways to save the girl!” The moral of the story is often seen as being “space is dangerous”. This may be the case, but as Campbell biographer Alec Nevala-Lee found in a letter Campbell wrote to a friend, the story was also written as a “gimmick on the proposition ‘Human sacrifice is absolutely unacceptable.’” The situation in “The Cold Equations” is intended to force the reader to agree that human sacrifice can be not just acceptable, but necessary. As a result, you can definitely see a lot of places where Campbell’s thumb is on the scale, and remnants of earlier versions.

There are a lot of things wrong with “The Cold Equations”, and therefore I choose my words very carefully when I say: *Campbell’s interference made the story better, but not for the reasons he thought.*

What makes “The Cold Equations” special, what makes it an enduring classic, is that it’s about failure. Given the grossly negligent environment in which Marilyn was able to stow away in the first place (per Richard Harter, “there is a word for pilots who short cut their preflight checklist. They are called dead.”), without which the story couldn’t have happened in the first place, and the complete lack of margin for error, and, really, all the other factors that Godwin-under-Campbell’s-guidance used to make the story possible... given all that, if Barton had been able to jettison the pilot’s chair, or whatever “ingenious” thing Godwin had originally

intended as the basis for a happy ending, then today... *no one would remember it.* It would have been Just Another Puzzle Story.

It’s more than that, though. I first read “The Cold Equations” in the early ’90s, in the same general span of time that I read “The Old Man and the Sea”, which is also about failure in some very important ways, and which may have nudged my thinking in certain directions. As is typical, I was aghast by the story’s conclusion, especially because there were so many possibilities as to how it could have been resolved without a death. But, I thought, that was the whole point.



I saw “The Cold Equations” as a classic not because the tragedy was unavoidable, but because it wasn’t.

This is what makes literature, isn’t it? Characters who aren’t perfect. They have flaws. That’s why the whole concept of the “tragic flaw” exists.

Barton was in a puzzle story. A life was on the line. All the pieces of the solution were there. And... he didn’t put them together. He wasn’t insightful or creative or educated enough to see the solution. He wasn’t bold or confident or stubborn enough to go against regulations. The pressure was on... and he didn’t make the right decision at the right moment. He wasn’t good enough.

He wasn’t the hero. He was only the protagonist.

“I didn’t do anything,” Marilyn says at the end, as she goes out the airlock to die. “I didn’t do anything.”

And neither did Barton.

And that’s why, despite everything, the story works.

https://clarkesworldmagazine.com/ogden_12_21/
<http://corabuhlert.com/2020/03/18/the-cold-crowdfunding-campaign/>
<https://web.archive.org/web/20060618204513/http://www.challzine.net/23/23fivedays.html>
<https://nevalalee.wordpress.com/2016/07/06/astounding-stories-13-the-cold-equations/>
<https://richardhartersworld.com/coldeq-2/>
<https://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/fiction/the-cold-equations/>

Movie & TV Reviews

By Keith Braithwaite



Zack Snyder's *Justice League* (2021)

Streaming on Crave

Fans pushed hard (and sometimes way too aggressively online) for Warner Bros. to release Zack Snyder's cut of *Justice League*—he was the production's original director—and the studio finally relented, premiering the film on the American HBO Max streaming service in late March of this year (it's available on Crave in Canada).

A little background: Snyder was the mastermind behind the DC Extended Universe concept and helmed *Man of Steel* (2013) and *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), both critical and box office disappointments which soured Warner Bros. on the idea of a run of interconnected superhero movies and team-up films. But the unparalleled success of Patty Jenkins' *Wonder Woman* (2017) seems to have helped keep the idea afloat and Snyder was at work on *Justice League* in 2017 when personal tragedy struck. His daughter Autumn died by her own hand and Snyder left the unfinished film to be with his family.

Warner Bros. brought Joss Whedon in to complete the project. Known for his celebrated television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), its spinoff *Angel* (1999–2004), and as writer/director of Marvel's *The Avengers* (2012), Whedon opted to substantially alter Snyder's vision for *Justice League*, rewriting and reshooting extensively to infuse the narrative with a warmer quality. The film premiered in late-2017 to mixed reviews from critics and fans, chalking up money-losing numbers.

The campaign to release the so-called “Snyder Cut” gained the support of JL cast members like Ben “Batman” Affleck, Gal “Wonder Woman” Gadot, Jason “Aquaman” Mamoia, and Ray “Cyborg” Fisher. Given the film's lengthy runtime, consideration was given to presenting it as a television mini-series, but

ultimately, the studio went with on-demand streaming, labelling the production a “full-length ‘Max Original’ feature film.”

At just over four hours, it's unlikely that Snyder's *Justice League* would have been released theatrically in 2017 without a considerable trim. But here it is in 2021, and with four hours at his disposal, Snyder has ample opportunity to elaborate on each of the heroes' individual stories, particularly Victor Stone/Cyborg's, whose narrative Whedon had cut drastically, basically to the level of sidekick. In Snyder's version, Cyborg is a far more interesting character and central to the story. Barry Allen/Flash, Arthur Curry/Aquaman, and indeed, all of the principals are better developed under Snyder, who restored the continuity that had been established among all of the DCEU films and excised completely Whedon's scenes of light banter among the superheroes. Perhaps most importantly, Steppenwolf is well presented, here, compared with his appearance in “*Josstice League*,” where he came across as a paper-thin, ineffectual villain. And, we are now finally introduced to his boss, Darkseid!

The action scenes are also expanded, to much improved effect, and there's enough fan service throughout to absolutely thrill comics aficionados, with appearances by the Martian Manhunter, the Green Lantern Corps, Jared Leto's Joker, and others.

Snyder's version has met with generally positive reviews, though not universally so. The director's style—an unrelentingly dark, largely humourless tone, simplistic emotional beats, often drawn out and verging on melodrama, and an at times overreliance on slow-motion and CGI—tends to illicit strong opinion, one way or the other.

In the end, however, the overarching story remains desperately derivative of Marvel's *Avengers/Infinity War/Endgame* combo, even though in the comics, Marvel's supreme villain Thanos was a arguably a rip-off of DC's Darkseid. Regardless, even with Snyder's improvements, *Justice League* seems a poor man's Avengers cycle, and Warner Bros. and DC continue to struggle with their DCEU, hoping to match the success of the MCU.

A Quiet Place, Part II (2021)

Streaming on Amazon Prime

In this follow-up to the critically-acclaimed *A Quiet Place* (2018), the story of the Abbott family continues. The original film introduced audiences to writer/director John Krasinski's post-apocalyptic nightmare of our world overrun by sightless extraterrestrial monsters that use their hyper-sensitive hearing to zero in on hapless human prey. In order to stay alive, then, those comparatively few remaining people must be very, very quiet.

Now, a simple, makeshift contrivance has proved effective





at incapacitating these creatures and the plot is driven, here, by young, hearing-impaired Regan Abbott's mission to deploy this weapon against the invaders. Having discovered that the sound emitted by her cochlear implant, when amplified, is effective at incapacitating the beasts, she improvises a contraption by plugging a microphone into a small, portable amplifier, so as to generate a high-frequency audio feedback loop when holding the hearing-aid up to the mic, the noise created disorienting the powerful, fast-moving beasts and stopping them in their tracks.

The movie opens as star Emily Blunt's Evelyn Abbott, now widowed in the wake of the original film's events, abandons the family homestead and sets out with her three children to search for other survivors. They come across an old family friend who has sheltered in a deserted steel foundry. Bitter at the loss of his wife and children, and cynical about the cut-throat morality of the desperate few who are struggling to survive in this frightening new reality, he informs the Abbotts that they cannot stay. "There's not enough food...water; there's not enough anything."

Two separate narratives emerge, at this point, with Regan convincing this family friend to help her locate an isolated island sanctuary that she has deduced is nearby while the rest of the family must soon contend with one of the creatures, which arrives to stalk them through the foundry. As the film nears a conclusion, the action cuts back and forth between the two storylines, building to a thrilling climactic finale in which Regan's device proves instrumental in saving her, her family, and humanity!

This is a perfectly serviceable sci-fi/horror/action picture with superb performances all around—in particular that of Millicent Simmonds as Regan—well-executed scenes of suspense and action, and riveting sound design. But we got all of that in the first movie, and so as is often the case, the sequel fails to equal the original because it essentially delivers more of the same, breaking little new ground. That said, this one's still a good ride, and better than most.

***Fantasy Island* (2020)**

Streaming on Amazon Prime

Horror movie studio Blumhouse Productions has revived as a feature film the old television series of the same name (1977-1984), a fantasy/drama with supernatural overtones, casting Michael Peña in the role of the enigmatic Mr. Roarke, a character made famous on TV by Ricardo Montalbán.

At a tropical island resort where magical spring water grants people the opportunity to experience their fantasies, a group of guests arrive to live out their respective dreams. One

young woman, Melanie, states that she wants revenge against a childhood bully; another woman, Gwen, wishes for a chance to accept the marriage proposal she'd turned down years earlier; two brothers, J. D. and Brax, yearn to party hardy as guests at a rave in a luxury mansion; and a policeman, Patrick, longs to see action as a soldier in the war that took his father's life. Predictably, their fantasies soon begin warping into nightmares.

There are a lot of twists and turns in the plot as the blood-soaked mayhem ramps up to eleven but the story is scattershot and much too convoluted for its own good. The cast do as well as can be expected with a sloppily written script in which the internal logic of the piece means nothing and a number of details make little if any sense. That is, of course, a hallmark of many a bad horror flick, which this thing most certainly is, without a doubt. Enjoy it as such.

A closing nod to the original TV show has Roarke allowing Brax's request that J. D., who was killed during all the chaos, be restored to life. Brax, however, must remain on Fantasy Island forever and will serve as Roarke's assistant, adopting as a moniker his college nickname: Tattoo.

So this has all been a *preamble*, then, to the events of the TV show!



***Godzilla vs. Kong* (2021)**

Streaming on Crave

While I so wanted Legendary Pictures' whole Godzilla/Kong giant-monster franchise to totally *rock*, I had my doubts that Hollywood would make the right creative decisions. I had hoped that the assigned filmmakers would come up with something akin to the *Battlestar: Galactica* remake of a few years ago, a solid, well-written, gripping tale that transcends its silly source material. If the cheesy, original *Galactica* TV show could be successfully reborn as the acclaimed, Edward James Olmos-led *BSG* series, why not those goofy Japanese kaiju flicks of the 1960s as a riveting, kick-ass, big-budget, modern giant-monster film series? I should not have got my hopes up.

While I appreciate a good, city-stomping brawl between giant monsters as much as the next guy, that alone isn't enough to sustain one's attention for long. To its credit, *Godzilla vs. Kong* features a lot more spectacular monster mayhem than either of Legendary's two previous Godzilla movies, or *Kong: Skull Island* (2017), and that's really all this so-called "MonsterVerse" has going for it. Like those two earlier 'Zilla films, the human characters, here, are for the most part bland cardboard cut-outs, dull and



completely forgettable. Their presence adds little to proceedings; their storylines: boring and superfluous.

I will acknowledge that Millie Bobby Brown's Madison Russell is just a *tad* more interesting this time out than she was in *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* (2019). With her nerdy sidekick, Josh, and newfound companion Bernie Hayes, a conspiracy theorist/podcaster employed by Apex Cybernetics, builders of Mechagodzilla—yep, they went there!—this trio do provide a few moments of quirky fun. But their contributions are woefully unable to lift the human elements of the narrative into *Kong: Skull Island* territory, that entry being the series' only well-rounded, truly first-rate film to date.

Finally, with the kind of massive, high-tech, super-science settings depicted, and Hollow Earth as a real thing, there was so much squandered potential for the out-and-out blast to be had with grand, old-fashioned, wildly implausible sci-fi! In the hands of a talented scriptwriter who could deftly balance the unbelievable majesty of it all with grounded, human stories featuring characters of some depth, we could have had us some above-average entertainment, here.

We'll have to settle, unfortunately, for a big monkey wrestling an oversized iguana.

The Nevers (Premiered April 2021) Streaming on Crave/HBO

It's difficult to gauge a TV series based on just a handful of episodes, but I'll give it a try.

A Victorian London-set sci-fi drama, *The Nevers* is the latest from Joss Whedon, whose halo has been significantly tarnished of late. He departed the series before the pilot episode had even aired, leaving the new show in the hands of co-executive producer Philippa Goslett.

Ostensibly citing stresses brought about by the pandemic for his decision, most observers suspect Whedon's abrupt exiting his own series had more to do with the recent controversy surrounding him over past alleged unprofessional, racist, cruelly insensitive, abusive, and misogynistic behaviour. Former *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Angel* actor Charisma Carpenter, and *Justice League*'s Ray Fisher have publicly levelled such accusations, each supported by several of their fellow cast members.

For his part, Whedon denies that he ever behaved inappropriately and regarding his departure from *The Nevers*, an HBO executive has stated that no reports were received of any untoward conduct on set. Oddly though, promotional material for the series made no mention of the show's creator.

The Nevers, like Whedon's earlier TV shows, plays on his familiar themes of female empowerment and the struggles of marginalized communities for recognition and respect in a society hostile to their very presence, all wrapped up in fantastical allegory. Under the circumstances, I can't help but interpret this work in light of its creator's apparent true inclinations and wonder if he's masking prurient proclivities behind superficial feminist storylines, a case of not exactly practicing what one preaches. I replay in my mind all of those kick-ass fight scenes in *Buffy* and other of his productions and must question why the female empowerment always seems to come only by preternatural means, and only for beautiful young women in attractive attire jumping and twirling and high-kicking opponents into submission. Was that just Hollywood being Hollywood; standard female fight choreography 101? Or in the same way that Quentin Tarantino indulges his evident foot fetish, does Whedon's work expose a thing for, to lift a phrase from bad-girl vampire slayer Faith, "hot chicks with superpowers"? Should this series turn out to be Whedon's professional swan song, there will in that be a certain irony.

Anyhow, the opening half-dozen installments of this series lay the groundwork for what could well prove an intriguing and most entertaining show. Let's focus for a moment on the Whedon-written and -directed first episode, which accomplishes what any good pilot must: draw viewers in and make them want to come back for more.

Three years after a strange event has occurred in the skies over late-1800s London, we learn that certain people, the vast majority women, have developed unusual abilities. Referred to as "The Touched," both the working-class citizens and overwhelmingly male powerbrokers of Victorian society are uncomfortable with, and even fearful of these individuals. Amalia True and Penance Adair are two Touched women on a mission to locate others in the city exhibiting weird powers, offering them the opportunity to live amongst their own in an orphanage sponsored by a sympathetic wealthy spinster—think Charles Xavier and his School for Gifted Youngsters by way of comparison.

The X-Men is but one of the influences, here, the Steampunk genre being another, but most of the character



templates stem from Whedon's own oeuvre. Some have noted that unhinged Touched killer *Maladie* reminds one of vampire antagonist *Drusilla*, for example. *Amalia* and *Penance I* found easily akin to *Buffy* and *Willow*, with *Amalie's* hand-to-hand combat skills, it has been observed, closely aping *Black Widow's* in *Avengers* while *Penance* is revealed to be a mechanical wizard not unlike *Firefly's* *Kaylee Frye*.

Lavish production values support a superb cast and the mysteries and multiple story arcs introduced were, by and large, effective at tantalizing the audience, though maybe a bit too much was packed into that first hour of the series to keep things properly focused. It was a bit taxing to keep track of all of these new characters, and the better strategy might have been to introduce some of them only in subsequent episodes so as to concentrate on and better present the lead players first.

In any case, these characters are each fleshed out, some more than others, in the ensuing episodes as the overall story advances and their motivations and complex relationships with each other are slowly revealed. And then, the mid-season finale takes things in a *completely* unexpected direction, the slightest detail even of which I'll keep to myself so as not to spoil the fun for those of you who may wish to have a go before the second half of this first season picks up in 2022.

Infestation (2009)

Streaming on Amazon Prime



During the lockdowns and self-imposed isolations of the past 18 months or so, our televisions, thankfully, provided welcome hours of frivolous distraction. We were taken away, for a spell, from constantly doom-surfing real-world news on the internet, thereby easing the days and weeks and months of both anxiety and boredom. One such distraction I had added to my streaming queue was this comedy/horror flick from over a decade ago.

Cooper is a millennial slacker who has been called into his boss' office to be fired from his telemarketing job for recurrent tardiness and general tomfoolery in the workplace. Suddenly, an ear-piercing sound overwhelms both him and his boss.

He awakens a few days later to find himself wrapped in webbing and feeling ill. He manages to disentangle himself, vomit,

and is promptly set upon by a man-sized beetle-like creature, which he successfully fights off. Awakening his also-cocooned boss and freeing her, the two make their way to the street to rescue the boss's daughter, Sara, who was to have picked up her mother after work when this inexplicable giant insect plague occurred.

They find the young woman seated in her car outside their office tower, sheathed in webbing as they had been. With his boss looking on fretfully, our slacker hero extracts Sara from her cocoon just as a giant wasp-like insect swoops down from above, grabs his boss, and carries her off.

A phalanx of giant bugs quickly appear to menace Cooper and Sara. Triggering her car alarm distracts the insects and the two of them escape into a nearby restaurant. There, they free from their cocoons a number of other people, forming a group of survivors, who debate strategies and are soon reduced in number by another bug assault.

More such assaults follow, and more are lost to the insects as the group treks across the bug-infested city, hoping to reach a nearby military base. Encountering a truly creepy hybrid of human and insect along the way, they learn that a sting from one of the bugs ultimately results in this wretched transformation and a couple more of their company will meet this grim fate before the credits roll, including Cooper's father, an ex-military man whose home bunker and stash of weapons offers the group brief refuge and an arsenal with which to fight the bugs.

The narrative is fairly predictable: Cooper falls for an initially reluctant Sara, she is intent on making her way to the giant insects' hive, hoping to find and rescue her mother, and is herself taken by the bugs, prompting Cooper to divert course so as to rescue her. And, the others are picked off one by one as the film unspools.

While any horror movie will include a number of incidental players who serve only as cannon fodder, there are, here, a few potentially interesting characters introduced whose storylines are quickly abandoned. Just as we're getting to know these people, they're written out of the picture!

What humour there is in the piece derives principally from Cooper's interactions with his companions, in particular Sara. The rest of the cast contribute next to nothing in terms of the funny. Look to a film like *Zombieland*, released in the same year as *Infestation*, for a superior example of effectively melding horror and character-driven humour.

Finally, the film ends suddenly and unsatisfactorily on a feeble cliffhanger, leaving the audience somewhat frustrated for having endured the journey.

Army of the Dead (2021)

Streaming on Netflix Canada

I find director Zack Snyder's movies hit or miss. While he is unquestionably an adept visualist, he does tend to overuse certain cinematic flourishes and draw scenes out rather more than is necessary. But simply, some of his films just don't work for me. This was one of them.

I quite liked the story idea, which combined an *Ocean's Eleven*-like heist movie with the zombie apocalypse trope. Describing the piece as a "full-blown, balls-to-the-wall zombie/heist movie," Snyder came up with the story and co-wrote the screenplay. On paper, it must have looked like a winner, and to be fair, the film did receive praise from a number of critics and



proved a popular release on Netflix.

And yet, I found that while all of the elements—characters, direction, action sequences, sense of humour—on their own, were generally good, and in a few instances pretty freakin’ cool, they somehow failed to gel as a whole, cohesive package. I was not riveted to the screen throughout, and I felt I should have been, given the MacGuffin driving the plot, the perilous mission of infiltrating a quarantined Las Vegas overrun by zombie hordes to retrieve some \$200 million dollars from a casino vault before the government decontaminates the city with a nuclear strike.

Perhaps it’s that star Dave Bautista was miscast; he’s fine as a secondary character, as demonstrated in the Guardians of Galaxy films, but didn’t quite cut it, here, as the lead. Critics almost universally decried the film’s lengthy runtime, and I agree that the movie is superfluously long and would certainly have benefitted from tighter editing.

Army of the Dead should have been more entertaining than it was. Great soundtrack, though, featuring a few offbeat covers of classic ’60s rock and roll numbers.

The Tomorrow War (2021) Streaming on Amazon Prime

This is a time-travel/ alien invasion/military sci-fi pastiche that, despite the skyscraper-high stacks of money spent on the movie—apparently, it’s one of the most expensive productions ever—fails to live up to its lofty ambitions.

The storyline is prefaced by high school biology teacher and ex-Green Beret Dan Forester learning that he has fallen short of landing a much-coveted job at the Army Research Laboratory. It’s 2022.

Things get going in earnest when soldiers from the year 2051 appear out of a swirling vortex of light during the globally televised World Cup soccer match with a desperate plea for help. In their time,

humanity teeters on the brink of extinction after aliens have decimated the human race. Tagged “Whitespikes,” the aliens appeared suddenly out of northern Russia in 2048, the means of their arrival on Earth undetected. A wormhole called the “Jumplink” has made it possible to time-travel and the desperate plan of the 2051 authorities is to recruit soldiers from the past—our present—so that these conscripts may be transported into the future to join in the fight against the Whitespikes, lest mankind perish.

Forester, who served in Iraq, is drafted into service and leaves to report for basic training, seen off by his wife, Betty, and adolescent daughter, Muri. He is soon deployed to a battlefield in a shattered, future-Miami Beach, where he and his fellow draftees are tasked with rescuing personnel from a research facility at which a deadly toxin to be employed against the aliens has been under development. Most of the platoon is quickly lost in the melee and those remaining discover that the laboratory scientists have all been killed. An airstrike intended to “sterilize” the area is imminent. With the clock ticking, Forester and just two others manage to escape the devastation with the lab’s vital research material.

All of this seemed to me a bit rushed, but perhaps that was a directorial choice meant to reflect the situation into which our characters had been thrust. Fair enough. Too bad, though, because several players had seemingly been set up as entertaining secondaries, only to become fatalities.

The pace slows and Forester finds that the commanding officer overseeing the operation is none other than his own daughter, Muri, now an adult. If Forester had not, the audience, certainly, saw this coming. He learns from her that he became despondent after failing to get that ARL job, eventually abandoned his family, and in 2030, died from injuries sustained in a car crash.



After more action ensues, Forester and Muri are airlifted to a fortified oil rig where is located the Jumplink. There, she refines the toxin, but because there isn’t the capacity to mass-produce it in devastated 2051, Forester must return with the formula to our present so that the toxin may be manufactured here and used to avert the war. As the Whitespikes again attack, Muri sacrifices herself in order to ensure that her father makes it back through time just as the Jumplink is destroyed.

The final chapter of the story sees Forester lead an expedition to Russia, having deduced that the Whitespikes did not come to Earth in 2048, after all, but much earlier, likely at about the time of one of the most powerful volcanic eruptions in recorded history, the so-called “Millennium Eruption” of Asia’s Mount Paektu in or around 946 A.D.

A crashed spaceship is found buried beneath a glacier and the initially dormant Whitespikes within are soon dispatched with injections of the toxin, and a quantity of C-4, at the cost of most of the expedition's members. A last Whitespike evades the fate of its fellows and flees across the snow, but is hunted down and killed, thus eliminating completely the future threat to mankind.

The melting of the polar ice caps due to global warming is speculated to have allowed the aliens to emerge from their torpor in 2048 and begin their assault on mankind. But that history is now changed, and Forester is determined to make sure that his own personal history changes, as well.

As I've noted above regarding *Army of the Dead*, *The Tomorrow War*'s component parts are all fine and good, by and large, but the whole just doesn't add up to anything approaching such stand-out military sci-fi actioners as the kick-ass *Aliens* (1986) or over-the-top *Starship Troopers* (1997).

Stowaway (2021)

Streaming on Amazon Prime



The crew of a near-future spacecraft on a just-launched two-year journey to Mars discovers an inadvertent stowaway aboard. But this is no deadly space alien that's got into the ship's ventilation system, or strange, extraterrestrial micro-organism soon to mutate into some lethal viral strain! Nothing like that, for this American/German co-production is a straight-up, man-in-space drama along the lines of *Apollo 13* (1995) or *The Martian* (2015), and the stowaway, here, is a launch pad technician, injured, unconscious, and wedged between two equipment modules, where he became accidentally trapped during the run-up to lift-off.

Extricating the man from his predicament, unfortunately, damages beyond repair the device that removes CO2 from the ship's air supply. Lithium hydroxide canisters are quickly deployed as emergency scrubbers but are not able to fully handle the load, especially with an additional person aboard. At this rate, all will have asphyxiated weeks before reaching Mars.

Mission control is advised of developments and the crew await their recommendations as to a solution. Meanwhile, the ship's commander has ordered an algae-cultivation experiment intended to unfold at the Martian colony to which they are travelling activated immediately in hopes of generating enough oxygen to maintain all aboard. But this ultimately proves unsuccessful when the algae dies. With no feasible solution forthcoming from mission control, the crew, and the stowaway himself, begin coming

to terms with what seems inevitable: in order that the crew may survive, their involuntary passenger will have to be sacrificed.

This is the moral dilemma upon which the story is built and while the pace of the film is probably too slow for modern sensibilities, the piece is well acted and I, at least, found it quite gripping, in particular the finale, in which the ship's young doctor, convinces her crewmates to attempt an untested EVA deemed too risky by mission control, but that could well fetch them enough oxygen for all.

This dangerous space-walk would retrieve any left-over liquid oxygen from the first stage of their launch vehicle, which was tethered to the ship upon reaching Earth orbit to act as the counter-balance in a rotating rig constituting the ship's inertia-driven artificial gravity system. The 450-meter climb "up" these tethers to the first stage will require carefully sidestepping the delicate, power-supplying solar arrays at the center of the rig, while dealing with the decreasing gravitational pull experienced as one approaches the center of the revolving apparatus.

A few complications arise before all is said and done, and the movie ends on a poignant note, but not as one might expect.

Tremors: Shrieker Island (2020)

Streaming on Crave

One of the most entertaining aspects of the original *Tremors* (1990) was the larger-than-life character of survivalist and firearms enthusiast Burt Gummer, played with a certain tongue-in-cheek bravura by Michael Gross. The original film was a spot-on modern creature feature that didn't take itself too seriously and offered audiences a whole lot of old-fashioned sci-fi fun. Gummer's antics were a big part of that fun, and the character, a caricature of a government-averse, bureaucracy-hostile, American gun nut, has been featured in all but one of the subsequent *Tremors* films (in the fourth movie, set in the old West, Gross played Gummer's great grandfather). *Shrieker Island* is the seventh installment in the series and serves as the final chapter for the series' most popular character.

This is not, by any measure, a good movie, which is a shame because Gummer deserved a better send-off than this film provided. I blame the screenwriters, who strained mightily to gift him with a quotable line or two, but were unsuccessful.

That's not the worst of their sins, mind you; most of the characters peopling this thing are cardboard-thin stereotypes only made tolerable by the actors portraying them, who somehow managed to elevate things at least to a level somewhat above the mediocrity of the script.



The legendary Gummer is talked out of his self-imposed retirement and travels to a private island owned by the head of a bio-tech firm to take on a group of Graboids and Shriekers, the latter being the bipedal second stage of this giant, carnivorous worm's life cycle. The chief executive, a nefarious man and fanatical hunter who stages dangerous blood sports, has bred genetically souped-up forms of the subterranean predators familiar to fans of the film series in order that the animals present more of a challenge for the wealthy, big-game hunters who have arrived to take part in one of his hunts.

It all spins out of control, of course, as the vicious behemoths devour, one by one, the members of the hunting party and it's left to Gummer to captain the battle against the monsters armed with everything from machetes to flame throwers to dynamite! In the end, an elaborate trap is laid for the last remaining and most formidable of the creatures and Gummer sacrifices himself to save a comrade and lure this so-named Graboid Queen to certain death in a manner that calls back the original film.

Gummer's associates erect a monument to him and each pays their respects in a surprisingly touching finale.

SurrealEstate (Premiered July 2021)

Airing on the CTV Sci-Fi Channel, also available on Crave



Top-drawer real estate broker Susan Ireland, played by Sara Levy (*Schitt's Creek*, 2015-2020), joins The Roman Agency, a decidedly unusual firm that specializes in the sale of haunted houses. Luke Roman, played by Levy's *Schitt's Creek* co-star Tom Rozon, also known to genre fans in particular for his portrayal of Doc Holliday on the supernatural Western drama *Wyonna Earp* (2016-2021), is head of the agency.

The outlandish premise of the show seems fit for a zany, *Ghostbusters*-like comedy but this Canadian series, filmed in Newfoundland and Labrador, is listed as a paranormal drama, and plays it straight, though not without a subtle sense of humour.

In one early episode, for example, a homeowner states "We don't believe in ghosts or spooks or evil spirits or any of that crap, okay! We don't believe in anything," to which his wife immediately adds, "We're Presbyterian." The scripts are sharply written and there's more to the characters than meets the eye at first glance.

SurrealEstate could well slip into a ghost/demon-of-the-week type show and quickly lose the interest of audiences, but equally, might pan out as a lot of fun in an *X-Files*-ish way. I'm hoping for the latter. Worth a look.

Report: *World Fantasy Con 2021*

By Danny Sichel



When it was announced a few years ago that World Fantasy Convention would be here in November 2021, I pondered whether to go, as someone had opined to me that it was more for writers than for fans. I thought about it, and decided that although it was possible I'd regret going, I'd probably regret not going a lot more. When 2020 hit,

and so many cons had to go virtual, I hoped that things would get back to normal in time for WFC to attend in person, and while 'normal' is still off in the distance somewhere, a few hundred people (including me) still managed to show up to the Hotel Bonaventure on November 4th through 7th, 2021 for a 'hybrid' con: some panels were wholly in person, some were wholly on-line (although with big screens for us meat attendees to watch them on), and some were... a mix, with some panelists at a table next to a screen, and other panelists on Zoom.

If you've never been to the Hotel Bonaventure, it's a rather odd experience: they're on the 17th floor of Place Bonaventure... surrounded by a lovely rooftop garden that you can walk around in. This garden seriously makes it feel like the hotel is at ground level. The conference center, which I *know* is on the 16th floor, doesn't have any windows that I could find, and feels like it's in a basement.



The Hotel Bonaventure in downtown Montreal

Registration was, as always, slow, and this time it was slowed down even further by the need to check everyone's vaccine status. Thank you to the provincial government for putting the info in QR codes so I didn't need to fuss with an app. Through a glitch, registration also had a ticket to the Award Banquet for me — apparently because I started filling out the webform to purchase one, even though I didn't actually complete the transaction. When I told them this, they said that I was being more honest than they would have expected, under the circumstances, and to just use the ticket.

The con itself was the usual mix of interesting things taking place at the same time as each other and less-interesting things that left time to check out the dealers' room and the con suite and the art show (where I got a print of that lovely Ingrid Kallick picture [WARP 111 cover image]). I attended panels on "First-Person Dead", about killing first-person narrators, and "Possession is 9/10ths of the Law", about intellectual property, and a panel on the rules of fantasy in which Farah Mendlesohn mentioned how annoyed she was by a recent fantasy novel that's set in Gilded Age-era New York, complete with anti-black racism... even though, in that world, black people had had powerful magic for decades. "Magic should actually *have an effect*," essentially.

I attended panels about the Void, and about what is Gothic, and about maps, and stereotypes, and alternate histories, and whether heroes still exist, and whether creatures can be heroes as well as villains, and what to do when your story just doesn't work.

I talked with Cenk Gökçe about a story idea he has, I talked to Shirley Meier about a story idea I have, and apparently I said something that gave a story idea to an Ottawa woman whose name I didn't get. I talked to Kofi Oduro about improv poetry, I told Jim Minz about the client with the sun machine story, I chattered briefly to Kevin Standlee and Cheryl Morgan about other cons, and I told stupid jokes to Joe Haldeman (and I asked Gay how she and Joe met; she said it was a high school dance, where neither of them had actually wanted to be there).

I bought *Chrysanthe* and *Angels & Exiles* from Yves Menard in cash because his card reader wouldn't recognize my card. I told Julie Czerneda about Sylvain (she hadn't heard, and was very sorry). I conflated Jean-Louis Trudel with Jean-Pierre Normand (sorry!). I bought a hoodie with Great A'Tuin on it from Liz Cano. I bought *The Heretic's Guide to Homecoming* from Sienna Tristen, *Harbinger* from Ian McKinley, and *Lamia's Daughter* from Shirley Meier, and got them all autographed. I got a green cloth carry-bag with the emblem of Christine Taylor-Butler's *Lost Tribes* series on it.

I met Ellen Kushner and Owl Goingback and Charlotte Ashley and Gordon van Gelder and Costi Gurgu and Christine Taylor-Butler and Derek Künsken and Eileen Gunn and John Picacio and Delia Sherman, as well as many other people whose work I *hadn't* heard of before.

Apparently one bonus of attending World Fantasy is the Book Bag: a big bunch of books donated by their publishers. This year, there was both a physical bookbag and a digital one.

I got:

The Mask of Mirrors, by MA Carrick; *Foundryside* and *Shorefall*, by Robert Jackson Bennett; *The Unspoken Name* by A.K. Larkwood; *Witness for the Dead*, by Katherine Addison; *Burning Days*, by

Glenn Grant; *She Who Became the Sun*, by Shelley Parker-Chan; *The Glass Magician*, by Caroline Stevermer; *Mordew*, by Alex Pheby; *The House of Always*, by Jenn Lyons; *Blood out of a Stone*, by Elizabeth Vonarburg; and *The Aurora Awards — Thirty Years of Canadian Science Fiction*, a 2010 anthology.

The e-bookbag included:

Wind Follower and *The Constant Tower* and *The Daughters of Men* and *Spirit Fruit: Collected Speculative Stories*, by Carole McDonnell; *Can You Sign My Tentacle*, by Brandon O'Brien; *Field Guide to Invasive Species of Minnesota*, by Amelia Gorman; *The Smallest of Bones*, by Holly Lyn Walrath; *Little Dead Red*, by Mercedes Yardley; *The Meadowind Proposal*, by M. K. Hutchins; *The Blood Witch Creek*, by Jay Barnson; *The Crystal King*, by John Olsen; *The Lure of Fools*, by Jason James King; *The Annual Migration of Clouds*, by Premee Mohamed; a *DAW* sampler; an *Ace/Berkley* sampler; *Papa Lucy and the Boneman*, by Jason Fischer; *Fantasy* issue #38; *Lightspeed* issue #133; *Nightmare* issue #100; *Futures and Fantasies* sampler from Adamant Press; *The Dystopia Triptych* anthology, volume 1; *Sword and Sonnet*, anthology from Ate Bit Bear; *The Writer's Book of Doubt*, from Ate Bit Bear; *The Violence*, by Delilah S. Dawson; *The Alchemy Press Book of Horrors*, volume 1; *This is Our Undoing*, by Lorraine Wilson; *The Dalliances of Monsieur D'Haricot*, by Barbara Stevenson; *Look where you are going, Not where you have been*, by Steven J. Dines; *Hadithi & The State of Black Speculative Fiction*, by Eugen Bacon and Milton Davis; *Cast Long Shadows*, by Cat Hellisen; *Black Moon* and *Claiming T-Mo* and *Ivory's Story*, by Eugen Bacon; *A Date with Death*, by Scott Colby; and *The Queen and the Tower*, by Shannon Page.



WFC 2021 poster by John Picacio



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