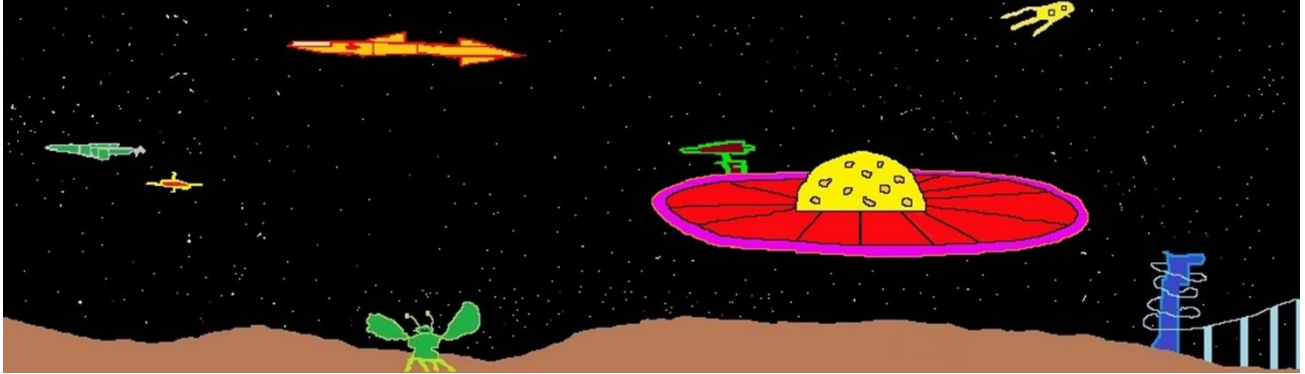


GREAT GALLOPING GHU!



A Personal zine by R. Graeme Cameron

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EDITORIAL: THE GRAEME SPEAKS!

A second issue, finally. This is meant to be a personal zine, free of obligations or responsibility. In fact I want my life to be free of such. For this reason I am largely gaffiated. I no longer do the myriad things I used to do for fandom. I now restrict myself to:

A 4 hour zoom meeting for local fen every two weeks / Occasional publicity re: local fandom / My FAPazine *Entropy Blues* / Occasional issues of *Great Galloping Ghu!*

The rest of my life is semi-filthy pro with the majority of my waking hours taken up by:

A 4 hour zoom meeting for SF writers, editors and other professionals once a week / *Polar Borealis Magazine* / *Polar Starlight Magazine* / A weekly book & Magazine review column for *Amazing Stories* / and maybe, just maybe, getting back to work producing the second draft of my science fiction novel.

Still a lot to be done on an ongoing basis. I had originally envisioned a series of series to place in this zine, such as entries from my 1967 diary, or entries from the journal I kept in Mexico, but I don't have time to write those often, as each takes many days to prepare. There follows five such labour-intensive articles I wrote over the course of last year. I'll slip in such once in a while, but mostly I will avoid the effort.

Instead, it will be my practice to quickly dash off some slap dash blatherings when I'm in the mood, and follow them up, as I do this issue, with book and movie reviews I write for my FAPazine *Entropy Blues*, albeit after the FAPA mailings have gone out (once every three months). This way my fellow FAPAns get to read them first before they are more widely distributed.

Will anything be worth reading? Well, it's just a personal zine. Feel free to ignore it. Ask me to stop sending it to you. I won't mind. Hopefully some people will find it amusing.

Oh yes, to save time and effort, GG will always feature the same cover, my digitalization of a drawing I did sometime in the late 1950s.

Cheers! *The Graeme*

EXAMPLE OF A FAILED BLOG

In May 2023 I converted my OBIR (**O**ccasional **B**iased and **I**gnorant **R**eview) website, where long ago I used to put book reviews until I started writing for *Amazing*, into a personal-promotion blogsite that would also host this perzine. I wrote and posted several blogs, intending several a week, but quickly understood that was a pipe-dream. Below is the last blog I was able to find time to write.

May 4/2022: Inevitability of Writer Procrastination

Christie Harris, a writer of YA novels, was a friend of my mother back in the 1970s/1980s. I frequently got to meet her during writer events hosted by my mother in her apartment in Vancouver's West End. On one such occasion I remember the subject of "the difficulty of finding time to write" came up. I remember Christie shaking her head in disgust.

"There's no such thing," she exclaimed. "A genuine writer can write anywhere anytime." She went on to explain what fond memories she had of the farm she and her husband once owned. She used to sit at a small table in front of the farmhouse, chickens running about her feet, a baby tucked under one arm, merrily typing away hour after hour immune to all distractions except the most immediate needs of her child and other assorted critters.

Well, good for her. Harlan Ellison often wrote in public, as a sort of "writer-in-a-cage" display. Theodore Sturgeon wrote in the nude at his kitchen table while listening to the radio playing "Golden Oldies." Good for them. Me, I require silence, comfort, and locked doors. Also an empty stomach, coffee, and a mental alertness born of hours of fantasizing about getting started. In the best case scenario I awake circa 7:00/8:00 a.m., make coffee, stare at my laptop screen for a few minutes, then begin writing. I am usually able to knock off before noon with a thousand words done, freeing up the rest of the day.

Alas, ideal conditions are rarely met. Sometimes I get up circa 7:00/8:00 a.m., make coffee, check the internet, wait for the mail, stare out the window, have a late breakfast, and go back to bed. All because I'm too tired to think. Why? Mondays and Tuesdays I host two zoom sessions that each last anywhere from two to six hours. Exhausting. I wake up Wednesday determined to write my next review column for *Amazing Stories* (due Friday Morning) but am still tired from the zoom sessions.

What I'm getting at here is the price to be paid for social obligations. Even going out on a shopping trip, or visiting friends and/or relatives, exacts a toll. Needful and

invigorating though these expeditions be (getting out of the house, meeting people, socializing) it often leaves me so tired I can't write later in the day or even the next day. Not so much a question of physical fatigue as a matter of losing the edge of my mental alertness. I don't think it's a question of a dire health problem. Rather, I suspect it is simply a case of my being so innately lazy and easygoing that relating to other people relaxes my mental and emotional state to a calm and well-soothed mood of somnambulance. This leaves me feeling happy, but also unfit for writing.

I empathise with Isaac Asimov. Bad weather made him deliriously joyful. It meant none of his friends would bother to call on him in his Manhattan apartment to meet for lunch or any other purpose. He could get on with his preferred business of writing. He got a lot done when the weather sucked.

Mind you, I don't know how Isaac handled the curse of the writer's imagination. Just as chronic depressives utilize the power of their intellect to rationalize and justify their depression (I speak as someone who suffered from extreme depression throughout most of my adult life—don't worry, I'm in my second childhood now and quite content), so writers tend to be very good at imagining why they can't write, shouldn't write, and will never write again. The amount of energy and effort that goes into that sort of thinking, if properly applied, would produce dozens of novels.

Worse, if you are worried about something, even if it has nothing to do with you, writers have a tendency to obsess and worry over things they can't correct or change. For some, it's the state of the world. For me, a former fan-activist and fan-historian, it's the state of SF fandom in British Columbia. I can rant and rave about that for hours, turning things over and over in my mind. Fat lot of good it does. Complete waste of time.

No wonder procrastination is inevitable. It has a thousand triggers. Both mind and body are eager to betray a writer. In that sense every writer has the soul of a traitor.

So, what's the solution? For me, to stop thinking. To keep my mind as blank as possible. That's the important first step. Fortunately, it's pretty much my natural state if only I let myself be myself.

Second, before going to bed, I read over what I last wrote. Let my subconscious chew on it while I sleep.

Third, I get up circa 7:00/8:00 a.m., make coffee, and start writing.

Yep, in order to write, all you have to do is start writing.

CURRENT STATUS OF MY NOVEL

“Dead in the water” might be an apt phrase. I’ve been so busy with other projects that I literally haven’t touched the manuscript for months. Yes, literally, for I print out each draft in full. I do my revision work with pen on paper because I find it easier to grasp text for editing purposes when I’m turning and reading printed pages. Which is why I print out every story submitted to Polar Borealis before reading it. My eye-tracks are too slick and fast when I look at a computer screen.

In other words the three duotang folders containing my first draft and partial second draft have sat untouched on my writing table, slowly being buried under a growing pile of yet more duotang folders pertaining to more recent projects. In that sense, nothing to report. Picture in your mind’s eye multi-coloured three-pronged Hilroy duotang folders. Nothing from a stationary store shouts louder to me about professional creativity than a pile of duotangs waiting to be used for the first time. Felt that way ever since grade school. I guess you can say I’m old-fashioned. I write my notes on blank sheets of paper attached to a clipboard, compose my writings using Word in my computer, and print out the results in order to revise them with my pen. Yep, definitely old-fashioned.

Anyway, woke up the other day with a solution to the logjam preventing my revision effort from flowing. I already knew I needed to describe one pivotal event that had happened *off-stage* in the previous draft. But on this occasion the other solution my subconscious mind had come up with while I was asleep was the necessity of expanding certain throwaway lines regarding potential threats into action sequences placing my characters in dire peril. Less introspection and more violence. Yeah, that’s the ticket! One way to avoid boring the reader.

Of course, this is going to force me to rethink the entire premise of my novel. So what? No big deal. I’m the author. I can write anything I want, up to the limits of my imagination. Too often writers forget they are totally free. Too often writers get trapped in the logic of the current scenario or are handicapped by their desire to keep dialogue or even entire scenes they are particularly fond of.

Never sacrifice the reader’s pleasure in reading your novel just because your ego demands a particularly deft bit of writing be kept in. You think it *proves* you know

how to write. Not if it slows down the story or knocks the reader out of the story, because what that really proves is that you *don't* know how to write, that you are willing to bugger up the effectiveness of your novel for the sake of a bit of scintillating prose. Or, at least, that's what you tell yourself. Actually, it might simply be a lack of imagination at work.

Fortunately, my bouts of scintillating prose are few and far between. My first draft is merely the result of my brain desperately scrabbling to get down the basics of what I'm getting at, but without thinking through any of the implications or likely consequences of what is happening to the characters. One of the pitfalls of writing off the top of my head rather than carefully plotting as I proceed. But I deliberately chose the pantsner-style of writing to keep my imagination unhindered by expectations. That accomplished my first goal, to get a 190-page novel completed.

Now, it seems, I've experienced one of those epiphanies I'm always searching for and can actually get to work turning the manuscript into a proper novel. Huzzah!

LOVECRAFT: LETTERS TO FAMILY – Volume One

Published in 2020 by Hippocampus Press, New York, NY, USA. Edited by S.T. Joshi & David E. Shultz.

The first volume alone consists of 529 pages in tiny print featuring letters he wrote to his aunts Lilian D. Clarke and E.P. Gamell from 1921 to 1925. Most derive from his early solitary travels up and down the East coast, but from March 24, 1923 through to 1926 he lived with his wife Sonia H. Green in New York City. His letters to his aunts then became a kind of frequent diary recounting his life in the big city.

Sonia, for reasons unknown to science, spent three years wooing Howard and ultimately convincing him to elope with her. She was highly intelligent and, like him, a member of an amateur press association of literati. They first met at one of their conventions. She was an ideal wife for a reluctant dilettante like Howard. He hated typing. So he would dictate his stories from his crabbed notes while she typed the manuscripts. Unfortunately, never having worked a day in his life, he was unable to find any sort of job apart from editing other people's books, a bit of ghost-writing (for Houdini, for instance), and the very occasional sale of a story to *Weird Tales* or some other zine. It was Sonia who was the bread-earner. Lovecraft did well by her, was well-fed, put on weight, and became unusually healthy (for him). Often she took him to the cinema and to live theatre shows. But, I suspect, being unable to contribute in

any significant way to the household budget proved bad for his morale. At first he was excited to live in New York. Ultimately, he grew to loathe it. More on that when I review the second volume.

For now, I'll just mention a few revelations I found interesting. It seems Lovecraft was heavily influenced by *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*, published in 1921, by Margaret Alice Murray. He writes *"Buttressed by an amazing array of sound documentary evidence, Margaret unhesitatingly asserts that the similarities and consistencies in the testimony of witch-suspects... treat not of dreams and delusions, but form highly coloured versions of real meetings and ceremonies... provided over by local cult-leaders... Cotton Mathers [of the Salem witch trials] thus stands vindicated..."* In other words, the witches were not tortured into false confessions, they were willing participants in a depraved and degenerate cult. We know today this is not true, but I can see why Lovecraft would find this grist for his mill.

And I was surprised to learn Lovecraft's opinion of the Elgin marbles on display in the British Museum: *"About the return of the Elgin marbles to the Acropolis—I'm in favour of it... the place for ancient beauty is on the spot where it flourished... You'll recall that Lord Byron mercilessly attacked Lord Elgin in 1811 for bringing over the marbles..."* A bit of historical detail I was unaware of.

In response to one of his aunts accusing him of not eating properly when Sonia was out of town he wrote: *"Bosh! I am eating enough. Just you take a medium-sized loaf of bread, cut it into four equal parts, and add to each of these ¼ can (medium) Heinz beans and a goodly chunk of cheese. If the result isn't a full-sized healthy day's quota of fodder for an old gentleman, I'll resign from the League of Nation's dietary committee!"* Hmm, I believe he died of stomach cancer when he was only 47 years-of-age. Lack of proper diet?

In reference to the famous Scopes trial on the teaching of evolution he commented: *"It really was a revelation to me to learn how perfectly and naively medieval the Tennessee mind has remained. Obviously, logic and information can produce no effect upon a psychology so entrenched in its backwardness... The only thing calling for active steps is the task of curbing poor old Bryan before he organises political machinery for stifling science in less benighted parts of the nation..."* This was written nearly 100 years ago. Prescient words!

And here's a revealing take on something very topical today: *"On paper it is easy to say 'possessions are a burden'... But in actual fact it all depends on the person. Each individual's reason for living is different... It so happens that I am unable to take pleasure or interest in anything but a mental re-creation of older and better days... so*

in order to avoid the madness which leads to violence and suicide I must cling to the few shreds of old days and old ways that are left to me... they are all that make it possible for me to open my eyes in the morning or look forward to another day of consciousness without screaming in sheer desperation and pounding the walls and floor in a frenzied clamour to be waked up out of the nightmare of reality..."

Methinks Howard had entered full-scale depression by this point in time, namely August 1925. Sonia had gone elsewhere to seek employment, and Lovecraft was now alone (apart from his Kalem Club friends). It wouldn't be long before his aunts enticed him back to Providence.

On average, Lovecraft wrote letters every day. It's estimated he wrote more than 100,000 letters in his lifetime. Many survive, most do not, yet troves in private hands unexpectedly emerge year after year. Research is still ongoing. What's the attraction for people like me?

His letters are a stream-of-consciousness diary of daily details and minutiae, while frequently mundane and boring, yet often fascinating, sometimes revealing aspects of the era that are not common knowledge today. It's like gaining access to a time machine designed to exhibit the innermost thoughts of an intelligent man in touch with dozens of equally intelligent and creative contemporaries. Call it a spider-web glimpse of past reality beyond the limits of current opinion that proves the past was just as real (and confused and complex) as our world is now. Amazing stuff.

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF CATO THE ELDER

Mmm, easy title to pick, since all that survives of his writings is DE AGRI CULTURA, a manual on farming he wrote circa 160 B.C., plus quotes in ancient books that mention him, of which Plutarch's LIFE OF CATO is the most famous.

Born in 234 B.C. in Tusculum, full name Marcus Porcius Priscus (Cato being a kind of nickname applauding his "wisdom"), he was one of the outstanding annoying bastards of all time. An unknown contemporary composed the following epigram about him:

"Red-haired, grey-eyed, snapping at all comers, even in Hades, Porcius, Queen Persephone will turn you away from the gate."

Possibly because the Roman people felt the Senatorial class needed purging,

Cato was voted into office as Censor in 184 B.C. Among other actions he permanently expelled from the Senate a Senator who had embraced his wife in the presence of their daughter. Cato himself, by the way, boasted he never embraced his wife except when he heard a clap of thunder. He also demolished all private houses built on public land, accepted only the lowest bids for city contracts, and increased rent for any usage of public land to the highest rate possible. His fellow Senators hated him. The public adored him.

No wonder, given his less than diplomatic wit. For example, when King Eumenes of Pergamum visited Rome, Cato, alone of all the Senators, treated the King with barely concealed hostility. When it was pointed out to him that Eumenes was a great guy and a good friend of Rome, Cato commented “That may be, but a King is an animal that lives on human flesh.” The public ate it up.

Did Cato have an ego? Well, he was the first Roman to write out and publish his own speeches. Though he despised Greek culture and influence, he was noted for being secretly proud that he was sometimes referred to as “the Roman Demosthenes” (a famous Greek orator). His most famous speaking habit? Ending every speech, no matter on what topic, with the line “ceterum censeo Carthaginem esse delendam” (and furthermore it is my opinion that Carthage must be destroyed). And, of course, as we all know, eventually it was, in 146 B.C. or about three years after Cato had passed away from old age.

He wrote a history of early Rome titled *ORIGINES*. I wonder if he mentioned the fact that Carthage had once been an ally of Rome? They signed three treaties, in 510, 448, and 306 B.C., in order to guarantee, as one treaty put it, “Friendship between the Romans and her allies and the Carthaginians, Tyrians, people of Utica and their allies.” They even jointly fought against King Pyrrhus of Epirus, though in separate campaigns: the Romans in Southern Italy and the Carthaginians in Sicily. Pyrrhus won every battle, got bored, went home in 275 B.C., only to get killed during a riot in Argos. Anyway, having flexed their muscles, lost, but gotten a lucky break, Rome and Carthage decided to slug it out in Sicily about ten years after Pyrrhus had bugged off. Did Cato explain all this? We’ll never know, because his history no longer exists.

However, *DE AGRI CULTURA* is still around, and I read it recently for the first time. It should be noted it was not intended for would-be farmers—Hah! Farmers! Staunch fodder for the legions, otherwise a waste of land—but for wealthy aristocrats like Cato looking for reliable sources of extra income.

He offers good advice. The ideal farm should be on the lower slope of a mountain,

so that an endless supply of water and good drainage were guaranteed, and next to either a navigable river or a well-maintained, well-travelled road, so that cost-effective transport of goods to the nearest, hopefully quite-near, market town was guaranteed. It should also be about 66 acres in size and feature good grazing land, a variety of soils for a variety of crops, a large vegetable garden, a swampy area for growing rushes, an orchard, and a well-established vineyard.

Furthermore, both the buildings and the equipment that come with the farm should be in good order. That includes the slaves, of course. Any surplus equipment, especially elderly or sick slaves, should be sold immediately. I'm guessing farm slaves seldom looked forward to a change of owner. Still, a good owner with a good eye for profit should be generous with their slaves in order to motivate hard work and cut down on pilfering. For example, each slave should be issued a new tunic and a new cloak every other year, but be darn sure they hand in their old ones rather than attempt to sell or trade them to slaves on other farms. The clothes belong to the farm owner after all, not the slaves who wear them.

Oh, and on feast days be sure to cut the amount of food the slaves receive. Since custom forbids them from doing the usual hard labour on feast days, naturally they don't need the "extra" food to keep up their strength. Fortunately, holidays are a wonderful time to assign them "light duties" such as: "cutting brambles, spading the garden, rooting out thorns, clearing ditches, and mending roads." How the slaves must have looked forward to feast days!

The right number of slaves and animals to operate the farm in the owner's absence is 1 overseer, 1 female housekeeper/cook, 10 labourers, 3 teamsters, 1 muleteer, 1 willow-worker, 1 swine-herd, 1 shepherd, 2 or more free-hire watchmen (read "guards" or "thugs"), 3 oxen, 3 pack-donkeys, a donkey for each mill, 100 sheep, as many cattle as the land will support, and as many chickens as possible.

Be sure to coddle the overseer. Give the housekeeper to him as his wife. Good for morale. Make sure he's literate and knows how to keep meticulous records. Be kind and patient when you visit the farm and ask him to explain why he failed to meet his assigned quotas. If he says he did his best but offers the usual excuses, such as the labourers had been sick, and the weather had been bad, remind him of all the things sick slaves can do on rainy days, like scrub and pitch wine vats, clean the farmhouse, shift grain, haul out manure, clean seeds, mend harnesses, and so on.

It's no surprise Cato's book could be found in the library of virtually every slave plantation in the Confederacy. It was seen as the best advice on the maximum utilization of slave labour, at least in spirit, so an endless source of inspiration.

Indeed, plantation owners prided themselves on their classical learning. The might and majesty of ancient Rome was proof positive that the economics of slavery was the key to the most advanced and prosperous civilization possible. To free the slaves was seen as the equivalent of inviting the Huns or the Goths to enter Rome, an act of utter barbarism. The Southern elite despised them damn Yankees as uncouth, uneducated, and uncivilized greedy mercantile scum opposed to the refined and pure elitism of decent Southern folk. Cato is, in part, responsible for the retention of slavery in the South as long as it lasted. He would have been pleased. But then, as I say, he was not at all nice.

For example, during one of the many Roman civil wars, the legion under his command captured 600 Romans fighting for the other side. This would have been an opportunity to exhibit mercy and earn the gratitude of all their relatives. Instead, he had all 600 publicly executed as “deserters,” essentially just to prove how tough he was. Well, he got that reputation, and more.

It is a tad ironic, but most of the advice on the actual running of a farm was useless to American southerners, in that it applied to the unique conditions of a farm located in the climate and terrain in the vicinity of Mt. Vesuvius in the second century B.C. For instance, the best mill stones to be had should be purchased from the stone-yard of Rufrius in Nola, but don't let him charge more than 180 sesterces per mill stone because that would mean you were being ripped off. If you can't make a deal with him, Pompeii offers the next best mill stones. Lucius Tunnius of Casinem and Lucius Mennius of Venafrum make the best ropes. Capua and Nola produce the best copper vessels, Rome the best nails, and so on. Having the best equipment is cost effective, because they last longer.

Cato certainly has an obsessive eye for detail. Ever wonder about the ox team harnesses you see in sandal-flapper movies? Me neither. But just in case you were wondering: “Proper length of thongs for the cart 60 feet, cords 45 feet, leather reins for the cart 36 feet and for the plough 26 feet; traces 27.5 feet; yoke straps for the cart 19 feet, lines 15; for the plough, yoke straps 12 feet and line 8 feet.” So, now you know.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the manual is the sheer variety of products Cato insisted a farm should produce. For example, the vineyard should be planted with the following types of grape: “Aminnian, the double Eugeneum, the Murgentian, the Apician, the Lucanian, other varieties, and hybrids.” This will produce a variety of wines, especially when you add extra ingredients such as sea water, starch, resin, marble dust, boiled must, honey and anything else you can think of. One of the wine recipes Cato was very proud of was a laxative wine. It involved 3 handfuls of black

hellebore, among other suspicious material, and was guaranteed to “move the bowels with no bad results.” Oh, and if the wine smells bad, a roof tile coated in hot pitch dropped into the amphora and left for two days should do the trick.

Speaking of farmyard experience-accumulated wisdom, macerated cabbage will cure colic, ulcers, painful joints, sores, boils, suppurating wounds, swellings, headaches, eye pain, genital disorders, tumours, and cancer. Good to know. Wild cabbage works best, apparently.

Cato makes it very clear operating a farm for profit was an extremely complicated and highly technical exercise demanding constant vigilance and extensive labour. The slaves only got a break when they slept or died. The excessive amount of detail he reveals is fascinating, amazing, and disturbing. Well worth reading. Brings the reality of farm life in the Roman world into sharp and painful focus.

I'll close with a *partial* list of the items he deemed essential to the smooth operation of the ideal farm: 1 candlestick, 1 bathtub, 3 iron hooks, 2 funnels, 1 small bowl, 100 oil jars, 1 water bucket, 1 platter, 3 carts, 6 ploughs, 3 yokes, 1 harrow, 4 manure hampers, 3 manure baskets, 3 pack-saddles, 8 forks, 8 hoes, 4 spades, 5 shovels, 2 rakes, 8 scythes, 5 pruning hooks, 3 axes, 3 wedges, 2 tongs, 2 braziers, 10 wine jars, 20 grain jars, 1 lupine vat, 1 donkey mill, 1 hand mill, 1 Spanish mill, 1 bed, 2 tables, 6 benches, 1 stool, 4 mortars and pestles, 1 loom, 8 mattresses, 8 coverlets, 16 cushions, 3 napkins, 3 strainers, 1 copper boiler, 1 clothes chest, 1 wardrobe, 40 grape-knives, 20 Amerine baskets, 40 wooden scoops, 2 trays, 5 grape-vats, 5 mounted press-beams, 5 windlasses, 5 hoisting ropes, 10 pulleys, 40 levers, 40 stout brace-pins, 1 sieve, 2 sponges, 1 set of scales and weights, 1 horse stall, 10 coops, 1 saw, 1 plumb line, etc, etc, all to be kept track of and accounted for by the overseer. I don't envy him his job.

Incidentally, the overseer was kept on short rations *all* the time because his work was less demanding than that of the labourers. But, since he was in charge, I suspect he was well fed, along with the cook. He probably cooked the books. Still, he's the one who got blamed whenever things went wrong. No job is perfect, especially for a slave.

MY SPACED-OUT DIARY

I used to keep journals, starting in 1967. They offer a glimpse into the past some may find intriguing. Much that is boring and/or embarrassing has been left out.

February 1967 – Living in Toronto, age 15, attending Jarvis Collegiate High School.

February 1 – Wednesday: News says the trip to the moon will take 20 days and that Gus Grissom had looked forward to beating the existing man-in-space record. Now he can't. But good news is they're predicting men around the Moon in six months and first landing maybe by end of year. Cool!... Rebels in China defeated. But Russians and Chinese really stirring up hate for each other. Reports of border clashes... New wing of Royal Ontario Museum has electronic dinosaurs and you are allowed to touch the exhibits! Can't wait to do that ... Today I suffered through tumbling gymnastics. I can do a forward roll but not a backward roll. At least I'm trying.

February 2 – Thursday: Mom and CHUM people are whooping it up in the living room: playing piano, singing, dancing, laughing, shouting, stamping their feet on the floor. Heard glass shatter three times so far. Mom never gets drunk but she does get tipsy... Superintendent's wife knocked on door and threatened to call the police! Hope we don't get evicted. Man, in the future when I'm living on my own I'm NEVER going to get drunk...

February 4 – Saturday: Spent the day with F animating Martians. This one he gets to keep because we alternate. F made the set, consists of control panel and computers onboard spaceship. I made four Martians out of green plasticine, the Captain (with two extra tentacles), a technician, and two guards, one carrying a green glass "shield" with projecting "laser gun" inspired by an Avengers TV show I saw.... Animated just one scene, the captain slithering into view with escorting guards. Would have done more but F's uncle dropped by and asked to see all our animated films, so F showed him "his." I didn't go get "mine" because that would take too long.

February 5 – Sunday: Finished animating film. Technician on upper level adds coils to computers. Then three Venusians (inch-worm-like snake things) attack, slaughtering Captain, technician and guard on right, but the left guard with green glass shield and weapon triumphs! Much writhing tentacles and being sliced to bits... Seems to me we experiment in "my" films and use proven techniques in "his." Oh, well. Fun hobby.

February 6 – Monday: Stayed away from school because I woke up with a terrible cold. Coughed a lot all day... Not a total waste. Finished my history essay. Was assigned "Why did Hitler lose?" I changed title to "Why didn't Hitler win?" I wrote it out but mom figured look better if typed, so she did that while I cut up maps and photos for a "How and Why?" presentation. She stapled the pages between two brown covers. Looks good. Better than my usual stuff.

February 7 – Tuesday: I plan that my next film will be about Martian-eating slugs. Was thinking of doing it by myself at home but maybe not cause F has improved the scenery of his HO scale train set a lot, so it's even better as a movie set now... Dad dropped by. I guess his second wife doesn't mind. He's thinking of taking Mom and I to the new ROM exhibit. That would be cool... R & C had a fight in the gym changing room. Neither used fists. Just hung on and kneed each other over and over. Bet their balls are bruised. At first, I thought they were joking but then realized dead serious. They really hate each other. Mr. C didn't know. Good thing. They could get expelled... I wish MONSTER MANIA MAGAZINE would do an article on STAR TREK. It's a good magazine. I have the first two issues.

February 8 – Wednesday: Our previous film got processed quick. Of my Saint cartoon only explosions and flamethrower came through at all. Over-exposed I guess. Natural-light footage of F's trainset greenish in colour. Maybe will look better with my light. Early experiment with Venusian "Inch worms" looks good. Have high hopes for recent film we sent off for processing... Started my own film at home. Going to call it "A look at Martian Wildlife." First character is a "Gleep" I made from "The Visible Man" model kit's jaws, some green plasticine, and glass eyes. Tentacles of course. Animated 12 feet of film footage. Equals about one minute of action. I'll make a "Glump" for him to fight... had a lulu of a Geography test today but I'm sure I passed it.... Minou is lying beside me in bed as I write. She is purring loudly. Love it when she does that. Helps me fall asleep quickly, because so relaxing.

February 9 – Thursday: Pretty hard History test on civics today, but I think I passed... Interesting Math Class. Mr. M lost his cool and called C "A jackass" who looks, talks and acts like one. C replied "Yes, Sir, but I'm not as bad as some people I know." This got him sent to the office for being "sassy." C is plenty tough. He's from British Guiana. His family had to move after a mob burned their house to the ground, so they chose Canada.

February 10 – Friday: "Dress-up day" at school. Wore a gold tie with my blue shirt and a jacket. Not as uncomfortable as I thought it would be... Mandatory needle shot from doctor visiting school today. I forget what for. Didn't hurt. Got me out of swim class, so that's good... People tell me C's family is rich. Well, he always pulls a big wad of bills out of his pocket whenever he pays the standard 30 cents for a school lunch. So, maybe. Me, I always avoid the daily swill and for the same amount buy two hotdogs and a chocolate-covered Long-John. Good enough.

February 11 – Saturday: Woke up at 8:00 A.M. Fell back asleep till 2:00 p.m. Got up at 4:00 p.m. Typical Saturday.... Did some filming at F's using his camera and leaving my light at home. Put a message on film for the Kodak processing people,

says *"You guys at Kodak sit back and enjoy this inane film."* Well, we think it's funny... Got an idea for a story. Earth destroyed. Last man alive alone on a space station. Two men come through hatch and tell him it's just a test. He goes back with him and explodes in vacuum of space because hatch is exit from airlock. The two men were figments of his imagination. In right market I could get 4 cents a word. Maybe... I have 300 pocketbooks. Pretty good collection.

February 12 – Sunday: Got up at 2:00 p.m. Started my Health project at 5:00 p.m., due tomorrow. Pretty easy, because we studied digestion in science class. I spent a couple of hours looking up additional information. Finished 10:00 p.m... I have a good system at school. Teachers always ask easy questions at beginning of class. I wave my hand eagerly. Teachers always so surprised they select me. But as questions get harder I wave hand less and less. With hardest questions they skip over me because I've answered so many already. Keeps me from looking stupid, I think.

February 13 – Monday: Got results of History test today. 26 out of 35. Not bad... In TV Guide I saw THE GIANT CLAW was on TV tonight. I immediately phoned F and told him to watch it because I remembered seeing it as a kid and what terrific special effects, etc. As soon as the movie finished I phoned him to apologise. Grade Z production, stupid-looking giant bird monster. Laughable. I did laugh. So, fun to watch after all, just not the high tech spectacular I described to F. Not sure he forgives me... Mom attended a display of holography at the ROM tonight. Says a photo of a plane was so real in 3-d it looked like an actual model floating in air. No viewing lens needed. No idea how that works. Apparently holographic movies are promised where you walk around the image as if being on the movie set when first filmed. Sounds impossible... In marks I'm way down in French, Latin, Science and Math. I feel so guilty about that. Proves I'm really immature, yet mature enough to know I'm immature. Basically I hate growing up. Going to take all the fun out of life. Believing that more proof I'm immature, yet mature enough to say *"so what?"* As for the cliché question: *"What do you want to be when you grow up?"* I reply *"Rich and lazy and stupid,"* which I suspect is not the answer mom is hoping for.

February 14 – Tuesday: Got 23 out of 35 on Geography test, so failure. But an A- on my project. Will it all even out? Hope so... Miserable in Latin class. How can anyone with such a fabulous civilization come up with such a lousy language? I hate it. I want to be educated but I'm not able to stand the strain... C got expelled, again... No heat. No hot water. Temp in Apartment only 40 F.

February 15 – Wednesday: F has forgiven me for telling him to watch THE GIANT CLAW but seems dubious about watching George Pal's WAR OF THE WORLDS on TV next Tuesday on my say so. But it's a great movie! Saw it first in the Rialto theatre in

Ottawa. Good old rat-infested bat-infested Rialto. Showed lots of old films before they ever got put on TV... speaking of movies. Been a year since I first saw articles in Famous Monsters promoting Harryhausen's 1,000,000 MILLION YEARS B.C. Still waiting for it. Soon, I hope...

February 16 – Thursday: F says he can get tickets for us to see the Monkees at Maple Leaf Gardens in April. Mom says she can get tickets from CHUM cheaper, but F wants to do it his way... I remember when mom got us tickets for the Beatles there, just before Christmas it was. All those screaming, yelling kids. We had good seats about 60 feet from stage I think. Just 10 rows of seats ahead of us and 3 rows of policemen in front of stage. They were very good, both the policemen and the Beatles. I remember all kinds of whirling coloured spotlights and popping, popping flashbulbs on cameras, the crush of people, and the unbelievable behaviour of the girls. All that non-stop screaming... Dad came over. Brought an electric heater since the hot water radiator heat still off. He's got 3 years to go in the RCAF before he retires. Says his motto for the Centennial year 1967 is "*Don't go to heaven in 67.*"... Mr. B in history class said today US in Vietnam only to protect investments and will leave when they stop making money, but when I mentioned this to dad he said fight against communism a real thing and the more countries that go commie the fewer the markets for Western goods. Both are right, probably.

February 17 – Friday: Happy days are here! Got a slip from the post office. Got to go to room 433 -1 Front Street West to pick up a package from Renaissance Products. It's my TWENTY MILLION MILES TO EARTH film! Only took 54 days to arrive. Trouble is the Post Office is only open till 4:45 p.m. weekdays only. Have to wait till Monday and then hustle fast out of school to get there before they close. Will be worth it though... A test in swim class today. Had to do five laps but only across the width. I asked "*Any style?*" and Mr. C replied "*No, front crawl only.*" I didn't know what he meant and everybody laughed. I tend to sink, but attempted to sink forward rather than down and somehow I floundered through the five laps. For some reason my ankles hurt afterwards... I may watch DR.CYCLOPS on TV tonight. One of the first horror films I ever saw back in Ottawa days. I think FRANKENSTEIN on SHOCK THEATRE was the first.

February 18 – Saturday: Got up early to go shopping for Mom, but for some reason my left ankle hurt like hell, so returned to our apartment and switched from my shoes to slippers within winter boots. Very comfortable... Later went over to visit F. Both of us very bored. I remembered a game I invented in Ottawa and proposed it to F. Required a bunch of tiny pieces of wood but he had plenty in the basement. Marked them as various kinds of ships and planes. Drew maps of bases and scattered them about his bedroom floor which stood in for Pacific Ocean and

defended islands. Pushed ships 6 inches a turn, planes 12 inches. Rolled die to determine combat. Even = unscathed. Odd = destruction. I don't know why we enjoyed playing this game but we did. For hours.

February 19 – Sunday: I finished most of my homework except Latin, which I will do after this entry... Here's an idea I dreamed up: write my books in pencil. Easier to erase... F and I had a snowball fight in the park across from his store. With pressure we were able to turn loose snow into reasonable snowballs. At first we just ran around aimlessly tossing the snowballs at random. Then we hit upon hitting parked cars so the balls would disintegrate and a cloud of ice would fly into each other's face. Sometimes it worked. Sometimes it didn't.

February 20 – Monday: After 57 days I finally have TWENTY MILLION MILES TO EARTH, and a good 12 minute film it is too. It has the crash, the birth, the capture, the escape, the fight with the elephant, and the last stand in the Colosseum. It is great. Harryhausen at his best. I think next I'll send away for SON OF KONG... Funny thing getting the film. Went to the Customs building by Union station. In room 433-1 handed the mail notice to a guy behind a wicket. He went and got my package, slit it open, examined the box cover, opened it and looked at the film reel, then an interior slip advertising their catalogue. To clinch the deal I showed him my copy of MONSTER MANIA with the original ad I had ordered from. Satisfied (I guess), he made out two forms in triplicate and took them somewhere. Came back and told me to go over to the Cashier. I did, and the cashier, based on his copy of one of the triplicates, charged 50% of the cost of the film, namely \$3.00. The Cashier told me to go to a different wicket. There the clerk, looking at his copy of the other triplicate, handed me my opened package. Happy to have it.

February 21 – Tuesday: Yesterday evening my left foot started hurting really bad. This morning even worse. Trip downtown aggravated what had caused pain on Saturday, I suppose. Anyway, mom said I could stay home. Bonus, got to complete Science book project I was supposed to hand in today. Afterwards watched WAR OF THE WORLDS movie on TV. Saw it in colour at the Rialto in Ottawa two years ago. Not so good on 24 inch B&W TV but still fun.

February 22 – Wednesday: I know 1,000,000 YEARS B.C. and FRANKENSTEIN CREATED WOMAN will be released soon, because I just got MONSTER MANIA #3 and it says so... Just watched an I SPY episode with Boris Karloff as an eccentric scientist with delusions of Don Quixote. He's still got the old sparkle... Mr. C wasn't available today so we had Mr. S as gym teacher. He scared me so much I attempted a head spring five times even though I am unable to stand on my head which is the position you're supposed to spring from. Then he made us rush up the folded bleacher seats,

the concrete wall above and then through the railing onto the balcony. Only my fear kept me from falling. Poor G couldn't make it. So Mr. S ordered "*the girls*" to help "*Sweetie*" up and over. The three guys looked both angry and humiliated. Mr. S certainly has a way with words.

February 23 – Thursday: Mom got tickets for the Monkees show at Maple Leaf Gardens because she works at C.H.U.M. radio. Apparently they are even closer to the stage than the ones she got for Frank and I when we saw the Beatles. Cool!... Biggest news item of the day was radio Moscow report that Chinese border guards had gotten into the habit of insulting Russian border guards by dropping their pants and pointing their bare bums at them. Russians couldn't figure out what to do at first, but finally came up with the idea of holding up huge photos of Mao. So, of course the Chinese had to stop. Otherwise they'd be insulting their own glorious leader. Communist solidarity seems a bit chancy these days.

February 24 – Friday: A 1.5 hour composition test today. Incredibly boring topics to pick from. I chose "An old trunk." First couple of sentences I wrote were: "*Quickly I turned and ran down the ladder. When I reached the ground I picked myself up and resolved not to run down any more ladders.*" Is humour worth marks? I'll find out... Mom got a 2-page letter from brother Stew in which he admits he just finished writing a 14-page letter to his girl friend. Mom said that was perfectly understandable, proportions about right. I forget which R.C.A.F. base he's stationed at in Europe but I'm pretty sure he's having fun. He included photos he took at an air show which featured two of the machines used in the movie *THOSE MAGNIFICENT MEN IN THEIR FLYING MACHINES*... Almost forgot, another test in swim class. As usual, us non-swimmers got a pass if we could flop our way across the width of the pool in the shallow end twice without drowning. Took a while, but I did it.

February 25 – Saturday: F phoned me to come on a wild adventure at the library. Turned out what he had in mind was exploring a nearby gorge the beginning of the Don River flows through. Steep slopes covered in bushes and trees. Mostly we kept to dry stones along the lower bank. Only 15 degrees with a cold wind sweeping through. Still, we had fun. Sort of... Afterward we wasted hours trying to develop photos in his makeshift photo lab in his basement. Maybe 10% showed something. He seemed a bit frustrated over all the wasted chemicals and paper. Not cheap. But he set it up only recently and puts it all down to learning experience. Indeed, I taught him something, that I know how to accidentally break his redlight bulb. I offered to pay for a replacement, but he said not to bother. Felt a bit guilty.

February 26 – Sunday: I wasted the whole day doing nothing. Kind of hard to describe. Somehow, I tried this or that, glanced at one thing or another, but

accomplished nothing. Finally finished my Latin homework just now. Great sense of accomplishment? No. It's Midnight, and I've got to start studying for the Latin test tomorrow. Good thing mom has gone to bed. If she knew I was only just started preparing for the test now she'd be mad.

February 27 – Monday: I don't even want to talk about the Latin test. I know I didn't pass... Got my Health assignment back. Only a B minus. Oh well, could have been worse... On the other hand, forgot to do my health homework last night. Been assigned three 8:00 a.m. detention periods starting Wednesday. Should be interesting... Got a haircut today. Only \$1.75. I like my hair cut short. Don't like the feel of it on my ears. I told the barber *"I may not look better but I feel better."* He replied *"Yeah, when you first came in you looked...ah, but now you look much better from the back."* *"Huh, just from the back?"* He laughed. I laughed. I avoided looking in the mirror. I hate my acne... Looking just now at my Aurora Monster model kit collection. Got Frankenstein, Bride of Frankenstein, the Wolfman, the Mummy, and the Creature. When we lived in Ottawa I had them all. But when we moved to Toronto I was allowed to take only one. So, Frankenstein is from the original batch. Not sure if the missing ones are still available. Guess I'd rather spend my allowance on monster magazines... Going to call the alien monsters in my novel "Maluii" pronounced "Mal-you-eye." Based it on a Latin word. Forget which one.

February 28 – Tuesday: We had Mr. S for gym again. B whispered *"Looking back at Mr. P (our grade nine gym teacher) he was a fairy god-mother compared to this guy."* Once again we had to climb the folded bleachers, not once but multiple times. It's difficult, especially the last part up the concrete wall to the balcony. Scraped my hands and my knees. It hurt but didn't bleed. *"If I catch you using the bloody pipes"* he kept yelling. Would have been easier holding on to the pipes, but obviously forbidden... Ah yes, grade nine. That was when sex education was introduced. None of the teachers wanted to teach it, so Mr. P wound up handling it. He thought a combined co-ed class made sense, but it was offered as a choice and both boys and girls voted against it. So, just us guys in our class. I remember somebody asked *"Mr. P, one of my testicles is bigger than the other. Is that normal?"* He was struck dumb. He had no idea. Somebody suggested he ask the school nurse. He said *"No, I don't want to bother her."* We still don't know. I think mine are both the same size. Is that normal? No idea.

BLOATED BOOKENDS

Most of the Science Fiction I read is covered in my book reviews in Amazing Stories. Here I talk about the other books I have read.

Napoleon: The Decline and Fall of an Empire: 1811-1821 – by Michael Broers, 2022, Pegasus Books.

650 pages of exhaustion and tiny print. More detail than even Nappie himself could remember. What inspired publication of the book is the French government allowing access to scholars for the very first time to an archive of letters penned by Napoleon himself, a collection apparently so voluminous as to amount to a personal journal.

No earth-shaking revelations perhaps, but a ton of petty detail that elaborates and complicates beyond the usual simplistic assumptions. Basically, what the book does is confirm for me that Napoleon, like Caesar and Hitler, was an invincible egoist, indeed a narcissist of megalomaniacal proportions, whose sole desire was to reshape Europe in his image.

For example, in writing to either Talleyrand or Metternich (the Kissingers of their day) he stated (I paraphrase from memory) “I grew up in military camps. My life is worth 100 thousand men. I don’t care if a million die.” Yeah, he’s one of the *Great Men* of history all right. Beware the *Great Men*!

And, it turns out, he was an even bigger idiot than Hitler. The parallels are striking. Both men knew invading Russia was a gamble. Both men assumed the key to victory was a quick victory. Hitler thought he could defeat Stalin in less than six months. We all know he was wrong. As for Napoleon?

Well, the Great Man thought he could decisively defeat Tzar Alexander in 21 days! He is on record as ordering his commissariat to provide the French army (actually only 48% French, the rest composed of “loyal” subjects like Prussians and Italians) with enough supplies to last that long. The Gentleman in charge thought Napoleon a tad optimistic and arranged for a 25-day supply. Surprise! Reality dictated otherwise.

The book is too detailed to conjure up a comprehensive grasp of everything it contains, at least in my case, especially as my memory sucks more and more of late. However, it confirms my opinion that heroic images of magnificent men in magnificent uniforms marching proudly into battle is delusional bull shit. The reality is cruelly different. Always.

Ten Days in Harlem: Fidel Castro and the Making of the 1960s – by Simon Hall, 2020, Faber & Faber Limited.

I remember this affair. Saw elements of it daily on CBC news. Part of my childhood. So, I couldn't resist buying this book.

It was quite the circus. It was a master stroke of propaganda for Castro and his 40 or so cohorts to book a suite in the Hotel Theresa in Harlem. Solidarity with the oppressed and all that. Everybody came to see him. People as diverse as Nikita Khrushchev, Gamal Aber Nasser, Malcolm X, and Allan Ginsberg, to name a few.

Ah, Ginsberg. He left Castro speechless when he walked boldly up, pumped his hand, and exclaimed "Marijuana is revolutionary, but the imperialists have invented all sorts of stories about it so no one will smoke and rebel. When are you going to legalize it?"

Castro, speechless, is quite an achievement. His speech at the United Nations before that august body is the longest ever, clocking in at 4 & ½ hours. This was short, by his standards. The speeches, call them endless monologues, that he gave in Cuba were often much longer, his longest more than 12 hours in length!

The sign of a *Great Man*? It's a psychological giveaway where Castro once admitted the only parts of Hemingway's novels he liked were the bits where the main character talks to himself.

As for Ginsberg, he visited Cuba in 1965 and was horrified to discover their ongoing persecution of homosexuals. He didn't help their cause any by stating to the Cuban Press he'd heard Castro's brother Raul was gay, and that he personally found Che Guevara rather cute. Castro had Ginsberg forcibly placed on the next plane out of Havana, which just happened to be flying to Prague, much to Ginsberg's surprise.

An even-handed book, reflecting pro and anti Castro sentiments of the day, with emphasis on the more amusing aspects of manipulation of public opinion practiced then and still in use today. I hate to say it, because Castro was quite the bastard, but today's shenanigans seem somehow less innocent. Far too many Great Men competing in the world today.

O Jerusalem! – by Larry Collins & Dominique Lapierre, 1972, Simon & Schuster.

A meticulously researched account of the Jewish/Palestinian conflict starting from the first incidents in 1920 through the 1936 Arab revolt to the end of the Partition War in 1948. A thoroughly depressing read.

I'll say it again. The on again/off again war has been going on for more than 100

years. It'll go on for another century at least. Neither side wants peace. They don't even want victory (which is impossible). What they want is revenge.

The Last Olympiad: Twilight of Antiquity – by Aleksander Krawczuk, 1979, Mondrala Press.

I turn with relief to this wonderful book. Krawczuk (1922-2023) was a classical scholar in Poland. Hugely popular in Europe, his 40 odd books were never previously translated into English because politics. That has changed.

Alek has a relaxed, conversational style, an erudite man calmly sharing his knowledge and informed speculation with you over a cup of coffee. He doesn't present facts, names or dates, instead he discusses them. Result? The society of the time springs to life, the educated pagans and Christian intellectuals who knew and respected one another, despite writing essays violently attacking each other's beliefs.

The book is full of nifty character studies. For example, that the pagan historian Ammianus Marcellinus would have been a grump no matter which side he espoused because he found fault with everyone. I think I agree.

BELOVED BINEMA

Formerly the title of my fanzine devoted to reviews of movies most people think should be tossed in the bin.

Keep in mind I normally collect SF and monster movies. Recently, however, I began to collect old war movies my brother and I used to watch on our B&W TV when we were kids. Not a sudden interest in war, but a nostalgic recreation of my childhood experience.

Air Force – 1943 – starring John Garfield, Gig Young, George Tobias & Arthur Kennedy. Directed by Howard Hawks.

A B17 has a bit of difficulty landing at Pearl Harbour on December 07, 1941. Bombs everywhere. They're sent on to refuel at Wake Island just before it's captured. They put up with more bombs bursting. Then on to the Philippines for a refreshing change of pace, as they're attacked by Japanese infantry while taking off for Australia. On the way they help defeat a Japanese invasion fleet headed in the same direction. Overall message? Things are tough but we'll win in the end.

Many tugs at the heart strings. For instance, everyone in the audience knows the Marines on Wake will be killed or captured, so naturally the scene where a Marine is begging the B17 crew to take the Marine's puppy mascot with them to "safety" in the Philippines hit home at the time.

In general, the maudlin outbursts are muted, or at least hidden by a quasi-documentary approach. Sure, clichés abound, but some of them might have been new when the film first came out. I'd put it down as a genuine morale booster at a time when the outcome of the war was still in doubt.

One nifty bit I particularly liked. The B17 is an early version lacking a tail gun. In the movie they cut the tail cone off and stick a 50-cal pointing out the hole, the gunner lying prone in the narrow fuselage, for that "sting in the tail" effect to scare off the Japanese.

Incidentally, to account for the large number of inferior allied aircraft shot down by the faster and more manoeuvrable Zero at the beginning of the Pacific war, the movie puts a huge emphasis on the concept that the individual Japanese pilot always turns tail and runs in a fair fight, and only acquires a good score when outnumbering the Americans. Not at all true but reassuring to the US public at the time. Typical example of useful and needful propaganda to address potentially war-losing doubts.

The Woman King – 2022, Viola Davis, Thuso Mbedu & Lashana Lynch. Directed by Gina Prince-Bythewood.

I had a lot of questions going into this film. I know that Dahomey was eventually conquered by the French and is today the tiny independent nation of Benin. In 1823, the time of the film, it was ruled by King Gozo who reigned for forty years and was somewhat progressive, in that human sacrifice and executions were on a small scale compared to that of his predecessors.

Nevertheless, the economy was partly based on slavery, and his palace sleeping chamber "was paved with the heads of his enemies."

Most famous attribute of the Kingdom, the Agojie, a unit of "professionally trained troops" which was all female. At times numbered as many as 18,000 "Amazons."

My question is, how historically accurate is this film? Answer: not very, and much criticized for this in Benin. It was filmed in South Africa, and the "authentic" music and dance is based on South African traditions.

As for the martial arts, it seems rather generic and not specific to the culture of Dahomey as far as I'm aware. I call it "Stuntmen generic" martial art. Identical moves are to be found in many movies covering many periods.

Further, I would call this film "Full Metal Jacket in Africa." Like that film it is divided into a training period which, while tough, is at least backed up by a delightful lifestyle in the palace barracks, and the second portion consists of a series of significant battles that convince as spectacle.

There is much outraged idealism injected into a family tearjerker plot but at least the circumstances are outside standard soap opera.

However, all of the above is irrelevant because of powerful performances by Thuso Mbedu as the young Nawi undergoing training, and especially Viola Davis as the General commanding the Agojie. Stunning performances that draw you in to the story by your eyeballs and never let go.

On one level it's just Hollywood-style history, but it's also a really well-made film, rather magnificent in fact, and I'm impressed.

I just hope the Agojie weren't as big a bunch of jerks as the ancient Spartans were but, after watching this film, I'm prepared to believe they were equal to them as warriors, maybe even better.

55 Days at Peking – 1963, starring Charleton Heston, Ava Gardner and Larry Niven. Directed by Nicholas Ray.

Much better than I remembered. Surprisingly sophisticated approach to racism, imperialism and stupidity of war. Often good dialogue, subtle characterization, and standout performance by Heston. Fairly accurate conundrum facing the court of the Empress Dowager. Quite a good film, in fact.

65 – 2023, starring Adam Driver & Ariana Greenblatt. Directed by Scott Beck and Brian Woods.

Weak, silly premise. 65 million years ago an alien spacecraft crash lands on Earth just before the asteroid impact wipes out the dinosaurs. Two alien survivors, curiously human in behaviour and appearance, resembling a man and a young girl, survive and trek across the landscape to reach an escape capsule that landed elsewhere. They hope to avoid the extinction event by blasting off into space in the hope of being found by a rescue ship.

Now, the dinosaur effects are top quality. Mostly velociraptors, flocks of tiny raptors, and hungry, hungry T-Rexs. Many scenes intensely derivative of the Jurassic Park series. But well done, so to kids who've never seen any other dinosaur films, quite exciting.

Yet the movie flopped. Both characters spend much of the time being too stunned by events to take obvious precautions. Further, only the pilot speaks English. The little girl speaks I don't know what. Their communication is a dumb show, which makes their occasional attempts to spite each other by refusing to talk to each other somewhat amusing.

I suppose the character "interaction" would appeal to little girls frustrated by their dads' inability to "get" them. Maybe to kids in general who find their parents frustrating. I gather parents are supposed to be enthralled by the pilot's inability to convince the girl to obey him. It appears intended as a "family" picture about the perils of abandonment and hungry predators but I don't think it works.

Still, Ariana's character, though mostly withdrawn as per plot requirements, occasionally convinces as an annoyed little girl. That she turns out to be a better killer of dinosaurs than the pilot does offer a bit of refreshing originality, but rather too late to save the film overall.

I'm not sure I'll ever bother watching it again. If I do, it'll only be because of the dinosaurs.

Greyhound – 2020, starring Tom Hanks (who wrote the screenplay) and based on the novel "The Good Shepherd" by C.S. Forester. Directed by Aaron Schneider.

Hanks plays an aging American naval officer nearing his retirement given his first command at sea, namely shepherding a convoy across the Atlantic escorted by his destroyer code named "Greyhound," a British destroyer "Harry," a Polish destroyer "Eagle," and a Canadian Flower Class Corvette "Dicky." They run into a wolf pack. Things get tough.

An austere, documentary-like drama, it doesn't compare in entertainment value to the classic destroyer vs. U-boat 1957 film "The Enemy Below" starring Robert Mitchum and Curt Jurgens. But it is far more realistic in its portrayal of the claustrophobic conditions, nasty weather, and terrifying confusion of battle in the North Atlantic.

Technically, the dialogue consists of reports and commands. But the real

dialogue is unspoken, composed of hesitations and momentary glances that convey volumes. The entire crew is easily more than thirty years younger than their Captain, and only now does he get his first command? Their doubts are more omni-present than the U-boats. His doubts are even stronger. Tom Hanks gives a masterfully subtle performance. That alone makes the film worth watching.

Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo – 1944, starring Spencer Tracy, Van Johnson and Robert Mitchum. Screenplay by Dalton Trumbo. Directed by Mervyn LeRoy.

I forgot how mushy this is. Tremendous emphasis in the first part of the film how perky and supportive the wives are despite their fear their men won't come back. An object lesson on how to behave.

Similarly, one wife doesn't care that her husband loses a leg and, in his eyes, is no longer a man. She loves him to pieces (pun intended) anyway. This addresses the concern of many women at the time of the film's release. After all, far more men were wounded in the war than killed. Many damaged for life.

Much is made of the playful interaction between air crew. The annoying scene where Texans force everyone to stand to attention while they sing "The Eyes of Texas are Upon You" made me resolve never to visit Texas. Are they really that arrogant down there? In general the ribbing was to convey a sense of the aircrew being regular guys.

Emphasis is also placed on Chinese aid for downed flyers in Japanese occupied China. The scene where a crewman thanks a Chinese Doctor who speaks good English and wears natty Western-style business suits irked me a little. "You're our kind of people," declares the crewman. As in a good imitation of an American? The doctor doesn't smile. He just stares. Interesting.

Dalton Trumbo, blacklisted in later life, managed to cram multiple pro-USA propaganda themes into what turns out to be a thoroughly watchable movie. It's a wonder it didn't stand him in good stead during the McCarthy hearings.

Wisely the film focused on the exploit of one plane in particular, "The Raptured Duck." Footage of it bombing Tokyo is among the most credible miniatures of buildings blowing up ever filmed. Actual footage of B-24s practicing short take-off runs is amazing.

To sum up, the film deserves its reputation as a classic wartime war movie.

Children of Men – 2006, starring Clive Owen, Julianne Moore, & Michael Caine. Directed by Alfonso Cuarón.

The film begins with news of the murder of the youngest person on Earth, an 18-year-old chap who was quite a creep, having been burdened with the fate of being the last child born. For unknown reasons the human race has become infertile and is facing extinction.

The plot has to do with a miraculously pregnant woman who is automatically a political football endangered by multiple causes and whose only chance of guaranteed survival is to escape from the UK into the hands of scientists who are searching for a way to render women fertile again. But that's not really what the film is about.

England is portrayed as a parody of its WWII self-image, a “can do because we go it alone” nation determined to conserve dwindling resources by arresting and deporting (or killing) all immigrants legal or illegal. In the service of which the UK has become a police state. It doesn't help that the pregnant girl is black.

The film is really a commentary on anti-immigrant racism in Britain. Like the best of SF, certain contemporary trends are extrapolated forward.

Toward the end of the film the girl and hero escorting her escape into a concentration camp, the entire coastal city of Bristol, where inmates are left to fend for themselves. Scenes depicting a funeral procession for a fallen “freedom fighter,” the majority of people wearing Arab headgear, praising Allah and firing AK-47s into the air, only to be attacked by professional soldiers equipped with body armour and supported by tanks, seem ripped out of today's headlines.

On the other hand, Michael Caine as an elderly hippie ex-journalist living off grid growing weed and spouting lame jokes is fun to watch. He is one of the few likeable characters in a society composed mostly of desperate, soul-crushed victims.

It's a grim film, rather depressing, making a solid case for repression and terror being the future of mankind just prior to our auto-genocide. Definitely a horror movie. The kind that would drive George Orwell to consume an entire bottle of sleeping pills. Be sure you're in an objective mood when you watch it.

Ready Player One – 2018, starring Tye Sheridan, Oliver Coote & Ben Mendelsohn. Directed by Stephen Spielberg.

Glorious mindless fun. An eye-candy festival featuring King Kong, the Iron Giant, and Mechagodzilla? Not to mention a second act taking place in the film “The Shining?” What more could you want? There’s a serviceable plot of sorts, and deliberately stereotypical characters that are part of an endless series of in-jokes that appeal to hardcore gamers, but there’s no pretense at message or significance. It’s just great good fun. A movie I’ll watch again any time I’m in the mood for pure escapism.

OOK! OOK! SLOBBER! DROOL!

(Letters of Comment)

Note: Annoying comments by The Graeme [*are in brackets*] immediately after introduction of topic in question. This, a feeble attempt to create the illusion of a conversation in the interests of conviviality.

Send your letter of comment to the.graeme.bcsfazine@gmail.com as I would appreciate your thoughts and opinions.

From: **Sally McBride** – (January 13, 2022)

Hi Graeme,

Thanks for distributing your new zine - I really enjoyed it. Most of it. Part of it. Well, a fairly medium part of it.... "how to write a novel" was fun and useful, and the photos and notes from your trip to Mexico was fascinating. Other parts I skipped over as not really my thing. But that's what you mentioned was okay to do... so.

[Yep. I'm writing this zine to please myself. Anyone who takes the trouble to glance at it is free to read only those portions that seem potentially interesting.

Die-hard fanzine writers and readers traditionally read every fanzine from cover to cover, mostly in search of comment hooks so that they can write scathing letters of comment. That's what passed for the bulk of fannish communication starting in the 1930s and lasting possibly as long as the early 1960s. But then, as "mainstream" fandom expanded and evolved, "traditional" fandom began to shrink to the status of a narrow-niche subfandom. Die-hard traditional fans continue to exist, probably several hundred of them worldwide, but are statistically insignificant and unknown to most

modern fans.

Myself... Essentially, from my point of view, there's just me and the hypothetical doppelgänger I'm writing this for. Keeps things close and personal.]

I look forward to the next installment, and to your work in progress when it comes out.

[I hope to publish GGG a couple of times a year. As for my novel... well, it's number one on my bucket list. Should mean I'll publish it eventually.]

From: **Lloyd Penney** – (June 19, 2022)

Dear Graeme:

It is good to see you back doing a perzine, and thank you for Great Galloping Ghu! #1. I had thought to do something like this in my spare time, but my spare time is getting more and more spare, all the time.

[It's part-therapy, part-something-to-do in those moments when I want to do something but am temporarily fed up with working on my other projects. Boils down to a choice: should I take a nap or take another stab at writing for GGG? Usually lying down for a nap wins.]

I had tried to write science fiction myself a long time ago, but felt that I had failed. I wondered about doing it again, but I have read little SF over the past decade, and a good writer also has to be aware of the market, and what readers seem to want. I am so far behind, I might never catch up to any degree with modern-day SF, and it would take me too much time and money to ever catch up. Over the past four years as an SF editor, it seems to me just good story is what is always wanted, no matter what themes are popular. Need an editor to go over your novel?

[Trying to figure out what the reading public wants is counter-productive. For example, there was a time when twinkly-vampires were all the rage. But by the time you finish your version of such, the public has moved on to something else. Instead, write to please yourself. If it catches on, a loyal readership will procreate by word of mouth. If their enthusiasm ultimately fades (it happens), then reinvent yourself and build a new following. This is the closest I can come to practical advice.

As for an editor, I already have a splendid typo & grammar editor in Steve Fahnestalk, who does an excellent job with my Polar Borealis and Polar Starlight Magazines. (GGG is entirely my own effort. It shows, I'm sure.) But as for the other types of editor specific-focus types looking at concept, story, plot arc, characterization and other such basic yet necessary matters, I've not yet made up my mind whether to seek them out. There's little I can afford, for one thing. And even beta readers willing to give their impressions for free are somewhat suspect in my eyes. With over twenty years' experience in presenting writers workshops I know how often critiques can be purely subjective and entirely irrelevant. Always a matter of accepting only the advice which is genuinely useful, and that is not easy to determine.

My imposter syndrome guarantees my self-critique can be ruthless, pitiless, and damned annoying, yet accurate and needful. So, I'm going to go through one or more revisions on my own till I am fully satisfied. Then, maybe, I'll seek other opinions. Remains to be seen if I will or not. There's the element of time to consider. Would like to get it published before I die. Don't want to make the mistake of endlessly puttering around obsessing over minor details or arbitrary, pointless editorial decisions. Don't want to spend the remainder of my life mulling it over. After all, there's a sequel to write!]

So much to do, so much to look after, so little time to read the books offered by Delphi Press. They sound so attractive, but time and money are limited, as always. We are just now finding out about our own health-oriented problems, and they need to be dealt with very soon, and that will take up valuable time, as well.

[At least writing projects keep one mentally alert and can prove a useful distraction from health problems, if only on an occasional basis.]

Finding out more information on Nils Frome is always good to see. I wish there was a way to determine who wrote THE CANADIAN SF FAN, and if WHY I HATE EASTERN FEN really did exist, I could think of a few people I'd write up.

[Australia is the key. It was Donald Wollheim who wrote the original review of THE CANADIAN SF FAN. He is alleged to have kept every fanzine he received. In order to raise money when founding DAW books he sold his entire collection to an Australian fan. When that fan died his collection was dispersed among several universities, numerous fans, and myriad dumpsters. It is just barely possible some person or library-archive in Australia today possesses Wollheim's copy of THE CANADIAN SF FAN without being aware of its significance.

I once researched this and discovered the identity of said Australian fan and the

fact that Legendary Canadian fan Mike Glicksohn once visited him and viewed his collection. Wrote an article but can't remember which of my fanzines I published the information. I may inadvertently come across it someday. Point is, if a copy of the very first Canadian fanzine still exists, it's probably sitting on a shelf or in a filing cabinet somewhere in Australia.]

When exactly did you attend Jarvis Collegiate? Yvonne attended Jarvis fall 1967 to spring 1971. It's possible you may have passed each other in the hallway at some point. She was in the four-year programme. I tried to keep a journal in my early teens, but there just wasn't attention span there. High school was not a happy time for me, even with good marks. My best marks were in math and physics. My marks in English were okay, but I never did figure out how to get better marks... I stopped trying when I saw how subjective such marks were.

[I was present for two years, taking grade nine 1965/1966 and grade ten 1966/1967. I had already moved to Vancouver (summer of 1967) by the time Yvonne began attending. I imagine just about everything I describe—the faded WW1 murals, the ice-water swimming pool, etc.—was exactly the same for Yvonne. Probably most of the same teachers were still there. More or less we experienced an identical school-culture and ambience without literally sharing the same time and space. Somehow that feels like the basis of a time travel tale, though of course it isn't. Does seem a trifle weird though.]

We are getting ready to go down to London, Ontario for a couple of days of being a tourist, and one day of sitting behind our Penney's Steampunk General Store table at the Forest City Comicon, and trying to sell our wares. We leave on Thursday, and struggle back Saturday evening. This is the first of four shows we've arranged tables at...the others are in Elmvale, Toronto and Coldwater. I hereby admit that while we hope for some good sales, seeing friends, new and old, are really what we're after.

[Hope you had and have a good time at all these public events. Be sure to wear masks though. Covid is going to stick around for years. Sigh.]

All caught up. I feel so far behind on so many things, I sometimes think I need to chuck something, and everything is on the chopping block. There might even be a decision soon. Many thanks for this issue, and I will gladly take some more.

[I have divested myself of many tasks. It does help.]

Yours, Lloyd Penney.
