

IONISPHERE 10 April 2018



Bulletin/Journal of the National Fantasy Fan
Federation Fan/Pro Coordinating Bureau

Featuring in this issue interviews with Sheila Williams and Steve Davidson

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Some people are wondering why I list what we are featuring on the cover, since this is not a zine appearing on newsstands or magazine racks. The answer is that the cover is displayed on efanazines and continues to be displayed on the NFFF annals at efanazines. Not selling them but looking for reader attention are we.

Ionisphere is issued on a bimonthly basis and is sent to every NFFF member with an online address, and would be sent to the rest of the Neffers if we could afford that many paper copies and their mailing.

Ionisphere's policy is to maintain and promote activity between fans and pros with the objective of promoting the spread and progress of science fiction and fantasy writing and to contribute to its literary respectability.



Information highways

EDITORIAL Long Roads Ahead, Fit To Travel On



Ten issues, over a year and a half since Ionisphere was brought back into existence from its former existence in the 1980s, back in the last century. The NFFF was suffering a lot of losses, and was commencing to build itself up again with President George Phillies calling out for N3F increase. One of the expansions was the revival of the Fan-Pro Coordinating Activity ordained by back then President Irvin Koch. Now a bureau, we have been making great efforts to increase NFFF activity and fannish activity in general and to involve the NFFF with the rest of fandom, *via* the recruitment bureau and news and publicity.

Fandom has gotten too discursive, and Science Fiction has spread into other mediums, losing its focus. This growth out into the world in general is a good thing, but the essential grounding has been forgotten and we are striving to re-focalize science fiction on its central area and re-establish its autonomy, while continuing to benefit from that expansion. The NFFF has a centralizing effect and we will be doing well to promote that effect and re-establish a centrality in which the NFFF is involved. We have already started attracting a lot of notice and attention, with considerable help from Jeffrey Redmond.

To do the rebuilding we will have to delve into NFFF history, and another new bureau has been established to do historical research, among other things, which is a bureau devoted to education into fandom and science fiction. With that bureau productive, members will be getting what they paid for with their dues, if there are any complaints that they have not already been getting that. The new bureau has already written a new introduction to the N3F for new members, and George Phillies has extricated filed material from a previous era of the NFFF which served that purpose and sent it to the bureau.

Someone in the Society for the Preservation of Fannish Fandom at Facebook posted a question about how active people were. I was able to cite a lot of NFFF and Facebook work. It was good to see someone wondering about activity, and I hope people will continue being interested in being active and the opportunities for activity.

INTO THE PAST a retrospective on IONISPHERE and the Fan/Pro Activity

I've been reviewing the past of Ionisphere from when it existed in the 1980s, during which time it was also dropped, with the Fan-Pro Activity not surviving for long after it. You can find my reviews of the first issues in the NFFF archives on efanzines if you were not here to read it. I now proceed to issue #9, November 1980, which features a cover of a night scene apparently showing the Washington Monument and the bright-lit streets of the DC area. There is fiction in the issue by Herbert Jerry Baker and myself, poetry by Steve Sneyd and John Singleton, and an article on religion in science fiction by John Boardman. Quoting from the editorial, "If you look closely at the title on this issue of Ionisphere, you will see something resembling scotch tape holding the lettering on, visible through the print job. Scotch tape is what it is. You might ask why I do not use paste. First, glue and paste in this city do not hold; the second is the reason I do not use ingenuity, as was Galloway Gallagher's, in making up for this deficiency. It is that I want you to have a good look at that scotch tape. I wanted to do some kind of a longer, better job of it. I guess now it looks like former Pres. Nixon or someone designed it. Like he's got time for anything like that." Listed staffers are Vernon Clarke, Anita Cole and Mark Hall. The book reviews are of TWO GRAY GIRLS, GREEN EGGS AND HAM, THE WATER BABIES, THE WORLD OF LONG AGO, THE SEA WITCH, MARY POPPINS, PETER PAN, THE LION THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE, and A WRINKLE IN TIME. Fanzines reviewed are Shadow Fapa (Harry Andruschak), What the Doormouse Said (Marc Ortlieb), Damballa (Chuck Hansen), Phandumb (Flint Mitchell), Thrust, Intersect (Lisa Wahl), Phosphene (Gil Gaier), and Riverside Quarterly (Leland Sapiro). Letters are from Joseph Napolitano, Edward Ludwig, and Jean Lorrh. Not much business was done in the issue.

Issue #10, February 1981, has a goddess rising from an unknown sea cover, an engraving with high artistic qualities but of dubious origins. The total distribution of Io is listed: Forrest J. Ackerman, K. Martin Carlson, Gertrude M. Carr, Walt Coslet, Pete Graham, Art Hayes, Dave Kyle, Janie Lamb, Sam Moscowitz, Ray Nelson, Fredrick Pohl, Rick Sneary, Bob Tucker, Mary Elizabeth Councilman, Harry Warner, George Wells, Stan Woolston, Jean Bogert, Howard Devore, Bruce Pelz, Eric Lindsay, Bill Bridget, Don Franson, Irvin Koch, Raleigh Multog, Martha Beck, William Bissey, Jack Williamson, Phillip Jose Farmer, Dave Bratman, Rick Brooks, Joanne Burger, Katherine Emblom, Joyce Fickies, Joanne Forman, Gil Gaier, Joanne B. Hanny, Fred Jacobcic, Beth Slick, Bobbie Marie Smith, Robert O. Welling, Martin Morse Wooster, Brigitta Henry, Sharon Shoemaker, Judith Gaither, and Mark Hall. I imagined in compiling this list having it be seen by future fandom. Now it is being, but this is unlike anything I imagined the future to be like; for one thing, I imagined it without the internet. The list were solid receivers; additional issues went to a revolving group of readers culled from the roster.

Also in the issue is the Credo of the SS Voyager Society of Purdue University. The fanzine reviews show various club publications that there are, and other fannish organizations.

Issue #11: Harlequin mask dancer on the cover. There's a reprint of an interview with Arthur C. Clarke done in Sri Lanka and published in a British news sheet, forwarded to me by Alan Dodd. Joanne Forman did an article on "The Need to Worship" responding to John Boardman's article. The rest of it is reviews, and interesting engraved fantasy art.

Issue #12: Steampunk cover. Art Hayes writes an article on "How the Photo Department is Doing". An interview with Carlos Rangel is reprinted from the OAS magazine Americas. There's news on conventions and the teaching of science fiction. There's fiction in the issue and a Northeastcon report by Gregg Trendein.

Issue #13: Cover by Hieronymus Bosch. A photo-illustrated report on the Indianapolis Writers' Conference, followed by a report on a meeting of the Circle of Janus, also in Naptown. Letters from Steve Sneyd, Roger Waddington, Joe Napolitano, Jeff Wilcox, and Stan Woolston. These letters were of course important to the Fan Pro department, being fan activity and interchange. Art by Juanita Coulson on the back cover. A lot that was in this issue concerned fannish warfare.

Issue #14, February 1982: The cover art was by Roger Waddington. There's an article on Gus Grissom Hall at Purdue University, accompanied by photographs. Also there is a report of a meeting in Terre Haute where Kurt Vonnegut was speaking, accompanied by photographs of Vonnegut and the crowds, which was followed by an interview with Vonnegut. There's some photos of a pyramidal structure being built on Purdue's campus. It's gotten old by now. Most of it is underground, but there's still a feeling around the campus that it's still there.

Issue #15: I had a photograph of a man at the Vonnegut meeting who looked like a man who had been at the Writers' Conference, also photographed, pointing out that I was trying to find where fans came and went. The editorial matter in the issue was about some sf and fantasy books and magazines of the past, naming stories like "Earth Alert!" that had been in them. There's photos of Hieronymus machines. I was trying to get Io as much like a typical fanzine as I could. A photographic article shows the SS Voyager Society of Purdue, including a fellow who looked remarkably like Bob Dylan. There were also photos of the Purdue Medieval Society, and a Chambanacon report written by several Voyagers who went to it. I kind of wonder where these people went thereafter, I haven't seen them in fandom since. John Van Natta wrote of early science experimentation at Purdue including rat lab. A reviewer goes over Vonnegut's books.

The cover of the issue was a photo of a pyramid in Yucatan taken by my father when we went down there on an expedition to look at ruins. I used it on an issue of Surprising also.

That's enough of Io's past for this issue, but I'll complete the look at them next issue.

EDITOR INTERVIEW



SHEILA WILLIAMS

EDITOR OF ASIMOV'S

Photo by Che Ryback

Sheila Williams has been the editor of Asimov's for over ten years. In that time she has had a remarkable effect on the magazine. Her close-to-home introductions to stories give the readers a real picture of the authors and some insight into their circumstances. Her editorials give a close look at the science fiction scene and the feelings involved in writing and selling science fiction. Asimov's tends to keep readers in touch with writers and their doings and points out where they may be found on the web. We have been wondering what she thinks about the way things are going on generally at the present time. Here she answers us in an interview.

IO: Asimov's Science Fiction has a reader and writer-friendly attitude, what with all the personal details given in introductions and the internet columns. I am wondering what you think of science-fiction fandom—does it have an importance of its own as distinct from the general readership? Do you think fandom is contributory to the development of science fiction?

SW: It's hard for me to make a distinction. People who write to us at the magazine tend to write to us as individuals. They don't mention whether they belong to fandom. That is, if someone is writing in about a story, they do so from their own perspective. I love going to conventions and SF societies and clubs and meeting with people who are very active in the field and who read our magazine. The conventions couldn't exist without fandom, and the magazines definitely benefit from having a base of readers who love and are committed to reading SF and who enjoy talking about it. I can't tell if readers/fans contribute to the development of the fiction—writers would have a better idea of that—but fans definitely contribute and make possible the communal space of the convention or meeting. I think this sort of information sharing is bound to impact readers, writers, and editors in myriad, if hard to pinpoint, ways.

IO: I noticed one try at a letter column and in fact had a letter in the magazine at that time. I wonder why the letter column was discontinued after so brief a time. Would maintaining a letter column not be beneficial to the magazine?

SW: Unfortunately, we just don't receive enough letters to justify a letters column.

IO: Why do you think fans are not writing to Asimov's? They did have an invitation to do so at the time you were trying to print letters.

SW: It's hard to say, but I think it's partly due to the rise of social media. A few years ago, a fan of the magazine put together an Asimov's Science Fiction Group. We now have over three thousand members. Members drop by with comments all the time. We recently started an official Facebook Page at Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine and look forward to communicating with our readers there as well.

IO: If you were receiving a lot of letters regarding the magazine regularly would you be considering a letter column again?

SW: It's hard to imagine that the volume of letters would pick up enough to justify the resumption of a dedicated letters column in the magazine. On the other hand, we are delighted to hear from our readers on Facebook and other forms of social media. Many of our readers communicate with each other on social media, too. This is an immediate and exciting way to get feedback from readers.

IO: Also, would you give any consideration to a column about fandom?

SW: I once approached a well-known fan and suggested a one-time guest column about fandom. I was told that fandom was so broad that their own essay would almost inevitably unintentionally do disservice to one branch or another. There isn't space in the magazine for a regular column on the subject—readers

want as much fiction as possible. I'd certainly be happy to consider a guest "thought experiment" on fandom. For my thought experiment column, I'm always open to pitches from authors on subjects that intersect with science fiction. Fandom, or something fan-related like SF conventions, certainly falls under that.

IO: Larry Shaw of **Infinity** thought a fan space was indispensable to a science fiction magazine, so there's a divided opinion on that matter. Do you think that most of the readership would begrudge a small fan space?

SW: Readers always seem to prefer fiction to nonfiction so I don't plan to expand our nonfiction, but I enjoy reading letters. Some have even inspired editorials and I always publish as many reader comments as I can fit in the annual column about our readers' awards.

IO: Do fanzine editors send you fanzines?

SW: Editors do not send me fanzines. Would enjoy perusing them.

IO: What do you think of the disappearance of the net forums? Do you have any additional information on why they disappeared?

SW: The forums disappeared for technical reasons. I don't know all the details, but I know we were no longer able to support the format. We're very happy with our interaction with readers on Facebook and in other forms of social media like twitter and Instagram.

IO: A lot of encouragement is given to writers in the magazine itself, and I'm supposing you must be maintaining correspondence with the writers in order to do the introductions. What ways do you have of relating to your writers outside of basic correspondence?

SW: Most communication is done through email. Authors provide their email addresses when they submit a story. I write to them directly via email when I'm accepting or asking for revisions. I also meet with authors at conventions and conferences. It's always fun when they come into New York City and I get to take them out to lunch.

IO: What contacts do you have with Analog, F&SF, and the less known SF magazines? What interactions exist with these editors? Do you have an information source showing goings-on in the magazine world?

SW: Trevor Quachri's Analog office is right next to mine so we chat all the time. I've recently been in email contact with Neil Clarke (**Clarkesworld**), Gordon Van Gelder and C.C. Finlay (F&SF), and Lynne Thomas (**Uncanny**). Neil Clarke and I plan to go out to dinner soon—he needs to give me my robot (purchased at last year's Nebulas and driven from Pittsburgh to New Jersey by Neil). Michael Damian Thomas (Uncanny) and I have been known to chat into the wee hours of the morning at various conventions. I've had terrific conversations with loads of other editors as well. I visit with lots of editors at conventions (in those rare free moments when we're not on panels or engaged with authors). There's no centralized information source that I know of other than what I see on Facebook. I don't go on twitter very often, but I'm sure there's lots of information there as

well.

IO: That was a good anniversary year for the magazine, speaking from a reader's viewpoint. What visualizations do you have for the future of the magazine? Do you have anything additional you'd like to say to readers of the interview?

SW: It was a lot of fun pulling the 40th Anniversary year together. Great to get new stories from people who'd been away for awhile like Connie Willis, Karen Joy Fowler, and Greg Egan. Had a lot of fun working on a series of stories with James Gunn.

Cadwell Turnbull and Emily Taylor are a couple of new authors that we featured in the anniversary year. Hoping to publish more new authors this year. Already have a few in the wings.



UNSUNG HERO

Many a mile I've traveled while your secrets I've unraveled
But don't know what all of it's worth.
I don't want to heed you,
I don't know how to lead you
So I'll leave you in the pale blue North. -JT

URANIA

Sweet autumn has arisen like a shade reanimated from the wooden house
Of Thanatos to numb the tepid glade and bid me name Urania my spouse.
The sable eyelid of the cosmos closes baring stars—bright neutrons in a brain
Embedded in a mind which now reposes and submits to that obscure domain
In which a particle becomes a wave in which a thought transforms into a shape,
A shape that stirs in shadow by a grave. My root among the stars at which I gape,
Restore to memory my native home, whereby, within my visions, I may roam. —John Polselli



A SWIFTIE

Tom Swift knew a little bit of joy when new vistas were aborning.
He knew they were utopias one and all, and he'd visit them all that morning.
For he knew the route, Hey! Over and Out! He flew over them in his Banshee
He could near hear them shout, for he'd left them no doubt
That in finding new realms he was handy. -JT

PUBLISHER INTERVIEW



STEVE DAVIDSON Developer of the resurrected AMAZING

Steve Davidson is among the people who have put a representative AMAZING STORIES on the net and who are now conducting a project to put a paper Amazing on the news stands. In this issue we find out more about the magazine and see how the project is coming along.

IO: Will the magazine, as projected, be distributed regularly and sold in magazine shops?

SD: This first question made me chuckle.

So far as regular publication goes, yes. We're setting up the necessities to be able to publish four issues per year to start. I had originally tried for six issues as there has previously been an Amazing Stories, Amazing Stories Annual, and Amazing Stories Quarterly and I thought it would be fun to be able to add "Amazing Stories Bi-Monthly" to that title mix, but our initial numbers didn't support that. On the other hand, I secured agreement from my partners that when we increase the schedule, we'll change the title.

We are not planning, initially, on store and shop distribution. We think we have a better model for getting there that required a few other steps first.

IO: What is the "jumpstart" you're giving to the magazine?

SD: I'm not sure what you mean here.

IO: I meant "kickstart" but I think I'll answer that question by quoting from the information bulletin you sent me:

GREETINGS, FELLOW FANS! The launch of the Amazing Stories Kickstarter Project will be under way in one week! On March 1st, 2018, we'll be asking for your support as we bring Amazing Stories, the world's first science fiction magazine, back into print. We'll be raising funds for the purchase of content (fiction, non-fiction and art), printing, promotion and to support staff efforts. Our first issue of Amazing Stories Quarterly will make its debut at Worldcon 76 in San Jose, and will be available shortly thereafter in both electronic and print editions. But right now we're asking for your help in publicizing this project, and here's what you can do: Spread the word among family, friends, co-workers and fellow fans. If they are interested, you can send them to the site, where they'll be able to see for themselves the articles and fiction we've been publishing for the past five years. If you are inclined to be an early

supporter—thank you! Successful Kickstarter Campaigns often begin with a flurry of early contributions. Participation within the first 48 hours is key. (If you are planning to participate early, please let us know by email.) If you have a blog or website, please consider adding a link or a post about the Kickstarter. Visit the site if you haven't in a while. Potential contributors may visit the site and a bump in traffic can't hurt our cause. And wish us luck!—Steve Davidson, Owner/Publisher Amazing Stories/The Experimenter Publishing Company. Our mailing address is Experimenter Publishing Company, PO Box 1068, Hillsboro, New Hampshire 03281.

IO: How would you describe the project to date and what will you be going on to do in the course of this?

SD: I've largely stepped back; the team has given me some tasks that I've almost completed, but they're running the show. Right now we're on the verge of launch. As the Kickstarter goes on, I'll be finding additional ways to promote it.

IO: What potential setbacks might you be experiencing?

SD: Mostly things of a personal nature, complicated by being underfunded.

IO: Give us some reasons for optimism regarding the success of this project.

SD: Your question sounds skeptical, and I understand that.

First, I can absolutely assure you that even if there were some reason that caused the cessation of the magazine itself, the website, maintaining the name and all of the future possibilities that entails, will not ever go away. I committed myself to seeing that the name never went into hiatus again and the costs of maintaining the website are as minimal as they can possibly be.

Second, I believe it will be successful because of the genuine love for the magazine that exists within the SF community. Note that I am not talking necessarily about the version of the magazine that I've brought into being, I'm talking about the concept: the World's First Science Fiction Magazine! Gernsback, the father of science fiction. Those fantastic Frank R. Paul illustrations, the authors who were first exposed to readers from within its pages, the fans who got their start in its letter columns.

There is not a single author I have talked to or exchanged notes with in the field who has not expressed some desire and interest to have a story published "in Amazing"; it's almost as if it's a credential desired by anyone writing in the field.

You can't beat the name, either. Check out the current crop of television advertising—the word "amazing" gets a lot of play.

But to be more realistic: there are several magazines in the field that are successful following a successful "kickstarter", so there is reason to hope. We've got a good team who have demonstrated over the past five years that they are dedicated to this project in a passionate way. Our preliminary promotion has revealed a great degree of positivity, and no small number of people pledging to support us (as well as asking for subscriptions NOW, NOW, NOW).

I've received only a small amount of skepticism and a lot of positive support.

And, for those who have their criticisms of me and how I have handled the website up until now, I'll share this. My wife's gift to me was to make me realize that I needed to step back from the magazine and give others the freedom to do things that I might not be willing to do, or can't do as well as they can. I'd like to

believe that I can select good stories and edit them successfully, but there are others more in tune with the current state of the field than I; I have my ideas of what a magazine ought to look like, but there are others with more experience (and probably better taste) than I. My role is to pick good talent and support them.

In taking that step back, I feel that the project has the best chance of succeeding to become not only what *Amazing Stories* ought to be, but also one of the things that our genre needs at this place and time. Regardless of tastes in stories or artwork or the other elements of a magazine, the team here completely converges on a single concept: science fiction must once again become a genre that engenders positive thoughts about the future. I'm personally a big fan of post-apocalyptic horror shows; I view many of them as nothing more than a desire to bring the whole mess we live in now down so that we can start anew, but instead of focusing on the places that we don't want to be, this genre really needs to start refocusing on showing us the places we ought to be going. Not post-apocalyptic, but post-post-apocalyptic. Tearing down is all well and good, but you should have a plan for building up before you start wrecking things.

Right now, for better or worse, we're living in the world(s) envisioned by the classic era of science fiction. Much of that world would not exist had it not been for the vision of those classic era authors. It makes me shiver to think of the kind of world we are heading for in the future that will be based on the visions of the current era we inhabit. The only way to prevent that from happening is to substitute different visions.

IO: An inspiring note, a goal of improvement in modern science fiction. I'd like to know the names of the others involved in the project, are they releasable at this time?

SD: Yes, though I have to stay mum at this moment on the contributors to the issue—we're going to use those reveals to help bump the kickstarter.

There's Kermit Woodall, who has been the webmaster for *Amazing* since its inception. Kermit was introduced to me by the late, great Bud Webster, a mutual fan friend. (Bud was an authority on the SF anthology.) Kermit has also succeeded to the position of Art Director for the magazine. There's Ira Nayman, our editor. Ira is an award-winning author who stepped up to edit our dailies on *Amazing* when we had problems. There's Tanya Tynjala, another award-winning author and our Spanish Language editor, who has not only brought us some great contributors from the Latin SF world, but also keeps us informed on happenings in Finland. There's Ricky L. Brown, our reviews editor; Ricky is an English Lit guy with a background in critique; Jack Clemons, a real, bona fide NASA rocket scientist who will be handling our science column, and Steve Fahnestalk, a long-time fan and fanzine guy, who I actually corresponded with back in the 70s (letter cols) who will be doing our movie reviews. And most everyone else who has been a contributor to *Amazing* over the years.

IO: Do you take suggestions regarding this project? I'd like to make a suggestion,

and that's to try to get support from Hollywood motion picture producers who have made science fiction movies. They have plenty of money, and might be interested in supporting a source for the movies they have made.

SD: Yes, of course we take suggestions! I've always believed very strongly that the SF community thrives because of a well-established system of the free exchange of ideas. It's nothing more than an extension of what Gernsback set up when he began everything. With his radio magazines (print radio magazines for young'uns who may think "radio magazines" is another name for podcasts) he had started a membership organization that helped promote the magazines, inspired contributors, and he started the same thing with fans of Amazing in the letter columns. The community surrounding Science Fiction is what makes it a "thing". Without two-way communication between fans and publications, fans and authors, fans and artists, Amazing stories would not be part of the community. I'll be passing your suggestion on to the team.

IO: Did you have contact with the people connected with Amazing about doing this magazine? Has there been any passing along of the magazine?

SD: The people who are doing the online magazine are the same people who are doing the kickstarter.

IO: Did you have a lot of feedback about the net magazine?

SD: Yes, I have. I've been thanked for "saving" the name. I originally registered it because I didn't want it to become a tool for promoting things not Science Fiction. My wife and I figured that at the very least, we could license or sell it to someone we'd vetted as having the best interests of science fiction at heart in order to recover our investment. I've been told, on numerous occasions, that the website is quite impressive (thank you), but the thing that I am most proud of is being told that it typically features high quality content.

IO: Anything you would like to add about the project?

SD: Yes! Check us out, ask your questions if you have any and then, if we've shown you a future you're interested in, please consider contributing.

IO: Thanks, Steve! This concludes the interview; as I say, it ought to get you a lot of additional interest.



An Earnest

Many a mile I've traveled while your secrets I've unraveled

But I don't know what all of it is worth.

I don't want to heed you,

I don't know how to lead you,

So I'll leave you in the pale blue North. -JT

BEHIND THE SCENES by Jeffrey Redmond



Are UFOs Really Real?

Last year was so filled with news that one outstanding report in the final days of 2017 seemed almost routine. For years an intelligence official in the Pentagon was running a secret program to investigate reports of unidentified flying objects.

In 2004 an oval object played a game of aeronautical hide and seek off southern California with two Navy fighter jets from the aircraft carrier Nimitz. The object then zoomed away at a speed so otherworldly that it left one of the Navy pilots later saying he felt “pretty weirded out”. You may too if you watch the video of the encounter that the Department of Defense has made public.

In considering these reports, this seemed to vindicate all those reasonable people who were dismissed and ridiculed over the years because they believed that something or other was actually out there.

There are well-known U.F.O. researchers, such as J. Allen Hynek, Donald Keyhoe, and Stanton Friedman. There are the latest newsletters from an organization called the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP). They remained resolute, even when many others gave up the cause. An Air Force-funded report in 1969 concluded that further study of U.F.O.s was unlikely to be of much scientific value, leading to the termination of the official Air Force program investigating the subject.

To the likes of Gene Barry, this report was merely part of the cover-up.

He was no astronomer or physicist, just a working man who endured the anonymous drudgery of a daily commute, who at night often felt connected to something larger than himself, larger than all of us. While his neighbors focused on the fortunes of the New York Jets, he was contemplating whether the “wheel in the middle of a wheel” mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel referred to a flying object of some kind.

A decade passed, and then came the report of a secret Pentagon program with the delightful name of the Advanced Aerospace Threat Identification Program (AATIP).

Funded by the government between 2007 and 2012, the program investigated aerial threats that included "unidentified aerial phenomena", or U.A.P.s, which is just a less-polarizing way of saying U.F.O.s.

To hardened veterans of the U.F.O. wars, the news of the government program was less surprising than it was validating. And the video of the encounter between Navy fighter jets and an unidentified object moving at an extraordinary velocity provided a helpful visual to the cause of those U.F.O. groups with long acronyms.

"Very interesting, very interesting," said Fran Ridge, the archivist of the research accumulated by NICAP.

"But the very first thing that entered my mind was: Why now? Is this a distraction? Is this something to get the people's attention off politics?"

"Finally, the kimono is being opened a little," said Jan Harden, the director of MUFON. "Personally, I don't need verification from the government. But for the mass public, it's important to know that there is advanced technology in our skies."

The news of the Pentagon's program received a stunning amount of attention that included the usual dismissive commentary.



Science Fiction and Fantasy Movies

There's an infamous quote: "Success has many fathers. But failure is an orphan." This certainly applies to all Hollywood films, and especially to the Science Fiction and Fantasy ones. There have certainly been great successes, as well as terrible failures, in these genres.

The most successful so far is James Cameron's 2009 epic sci fi adventure, AVATAR. It cost \$237 million to make, and made \$2.8 billion at the box office. There's story, action, suspense, better dialogue, and Peter Jackson's Weta Digital special effects making it visually unique. Four sequels are currently in simultaneous production.

The 2002 dystopian sci fi movie EQUILIBRIUM cost twenty million to make, but only made six million at the box office. Starring Christian Bale, Emily Watson, and Taye Diggs, it was filmed in Berlin, and used several old Nazi buildings for the effects of a totalitarian

system. It had good stunts and special effects, with Bale slaughtering countless numbers of bad guys throughout. Yet there was not enough story, dialogue, relationships, or interest for audiences. So it flopped.

As in all other things, everyone involved will try to take credit for any success, while all failures see vehement blame, excuses, denials, and finger pointing. Many Hollywood films have had their share of problems, and quite often the clashes of monumental egos are never overcome.

There's another quote about Science Fiction cinema, about a longstanding problem: Good ideas abound, but great ones are in short supply. And most of the good ones have already been used. The ingredients usually are another planet, space aliens, a futuristic time, travelers from Earth, robots, androids, time travel, space ships, and attractive humanoid females.

But three basic ingredients seem to be present in most successful sci fi movies: (1) Technology, (2) Engaging Story, and (3) Character Development. This means a good script, a competent director, and enough special effects. Films need to have wide audience appeal in initial theatrical release, and especially for teenagers too young to legally drink in alcohol-serving establishments.

So there have been some remarkable movie successes: The BACK TO THE FUTURE trilogy made a \$385 million profit. It stars Michael J. Fox (from Canada) and Christopher Lloyd. With time travel, suspense, good dialogue, and a well-entertaining storyline, the special effects made them all perfect.

George Lucas's STAR WARS films have the myths of the Jedi Knights and The Force. There's complex relationships such as between a female of the nobility and a rogue. Along with special effects, there's cute aliens and robots, and the triumph of good over evil. Joseph Campbell identified these Great Quest elements as fundamental to all epic adventures in Western Civilization.

STAR WARS movies have earned \$2.6 billion in profits, and will continue making even more.

The post-apocalyptic WALKING DEAD television series has survivalism, dangerous zombies, and two or three-dimensional portrayals of the story characters. Humans learn, grow, and develop throughout the story, as they struggle to escape from the ever-present undead. Each episode costs \$326,000 to make, and earns eleven million from advertisers. More than a hundred episodes have been made so far.

Conversely, there have also been science fiction film failures:

John Boorman's post-apocalyptic ZARDOZ (1974) cost \$1.5 million, but only earned \$1.8 million. It was filmed in Ireland, and stars Sean Connery (from Scotland), doing most of his own stunts at age 44. But the story is confusing, and the script mediocre. Perhaps a better director could have achieved more with it.

Walt Disney's JOHN CARTER (2012) cost \$307 million to make, and only earned \$284

million. It's more of a Western than Science Fiction, and not enough like the original Edgar Rice Burroughs story. The Disney company refused to allow reviews, and interfered with the production and development. The sound track includes songs from rock bands of forty years ago, which are not that appealing to teenagers today. Plans for a sequel were cancelled.

BATTLEFIELD EARTH (2000) starring John Travolta cost \$73 million, but only made \$30 million. It was from a story by L. Ron Hubbard and the Church of Scientology, about futuristic space aliens ruling over our planet. It was immediately involved in various lawsuits, and plans for sequels were quickly cancelled. The producers overstated the film's budget by \$31 million, and apparently pocketed the difference.

There will continue to be science fiction genre films, and they will be as good or bad as before. Among the ironies of Hollywood productions are that big name stars don't always make for successful movies. And no name actors can appear in highly profitable ones. Audiences are receptive to quality, and not just quantity, in their entertainment.

Movies with a point, a good story, and even a moral lesson will be successes. Films that are entertaining and educational will have more appeal to viewers. Special effects can enhance productions, but scripts with better dialogue than mere shouting and obscenities provide for more positive public reactions. Actors doing more than killing space aliens, and actresses having more to do than losing their costumes, do make for better features. And the Science Fiction genre can certainly lead the way in this.



LETTERS



Here is a communication belated by having gotten lost in the rush last issue:

DAVE CREEK: Here's an update since you conducted that interview with me:

Rather than waiting to premiere CHANDA'S AWAKENING at Imaginarium, Hydra has already released it. Certainly I'll be promoting it at Imaginarium, and before that at SFWA's Nebula Awards Weekend in Pittsburgh in May.

As for MARS ABIDES, it's also been released now, and I'm proud of having obtained the rights to use a Chesley Bonestell painting for its cover. Very striking! Your readers can find my books on my Amazon page, www.amazon.com/author/davecreek .

Also, this update: my email address is no longer davedana@aye.net . That address is now defunct. Please use the dave@davecreek.com address.

Thanks again for the reviews!

A brief one from another person having been interviewed:

DAN HATCH: The interview looks great.

Dan, I really appreciate that. I'm hoping when I do an interview that it will turn out to be satisfactory to the person being interviewed, and it's very nice indeed to receive a verification that the interview meets the standards of the person interviewed.

We're getting the liveliest writers in our interviews, people who have done something unconventional in their writing, and who seem on the spot.

Interviews this issue. Sheila Williams has a Facebook page and is on the Asimov's Facebook page. Write asimovssf@asimovs.com with letters about the magazine. She does not accept story submissions at this address. Steve Davidson's email is steve.davidson@tds.net .



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