In this issue

SFRA Review Business
Prospect ........................................................................................................................................... 2

SFRA Business
The New SFRA Website .................................................................................................................. 2
“It’s Alive!” ........................................................................................................................................ 3
Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities .................................................................................... 3

Feature 101
The New Cosmic Horror: A Genre Moulded by Tabletop Roleplaying Games and Postmodern Horror ..................................................................................................................... 7
Sentience in Science Fiction 101 ................................................................................................... 14

Nonfiction Reviews
Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction ............................................. 19
Body, Soul and Cyberspace in Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema: Virtual Worlds and Ethical Problems ........................................................................................................................................... 20
They Live ............................................................................................................................................ 21
Modernism and Science Fiction ..................................................................................................... 23

Fiction Reviews
The Collected Stories of Frank Herbert ............................................................................................. 25
Il sangue e L’impero ....................................................................................................................... 29

Media Reviews
Daredevil and Jessica Jones – The Future of Superheroic Storytelling? ........................................ 32
The Man in the High Castle: Season 1 .............................................................................................. 34
Advantageous ..................................................................................................................................... 36

Announcements
Call for Papers—Conference ........................................................................................................... 40
Call for Papers—Articles .................................................................................................................. 43

Submissions
The SFRA Review encourages submissions of reviews, review essays that cover several related
texts, interviews, and feature articles. Submission guidelines are available at http://www.sfra.
org or by inquiry to the appropriate editor. All submitters must be current SFRA members.
Contact the Editors for other submissions or for correspondence.

The SFRA Review (ISSN 1068-395X) is published four times a year by the Science Fiction
Research Association (SFRA), and distributed to SFRA members. Individual issues are not for
sale; however, all issues after 256 are published to SFRA’s Website (http://www.sfra.org/).
PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

The New SFRA Website
Craig Jacobsen

JUST AS 2015 ENDED, the SFRA website took a nose-dive. This sometimes happens. Unfortunately, this time we were not easily able to recover the site from a recent backup and go about our business. As the Executive Committee and Matt Holtmeier (our SFRA Web Director) looked into it, it became clear that perhaps it was time to give up on our old model of website and look at new options. Like a lot of small organizations, SFRA has depended upon a handful of members with the technological knowledge necessary to keep us online, updated, and secure. Frankly, that’s just not a sustainable model anymore.

We were running a site built on Drupal, with a number of plugins that allowed us to do things like manage memberships, with a custom theme. The company that hosted our site had nothing to do with putting it together. The people who put it together were hired for a one-time job, not ongoing maintenance and troubleshooting. We needed to update our plugins and Drupal to be sure that we had the latest, most secure and stable versions. Too big of a job for volunteers. And a few months down the road we’d likely need that again. And again.

So we’re moving to a 2016-style solution that will combine all of the technological infrastructure of the organization (well, almost all) in one place. The new site is built around a Member Management System, so we’ll be able to do a number of things we haven’t before. The jobs of the SFRA Treasurer and Secretary will be made more manageable (that’s incentive for those of you who might consider holding those positions), and the new site will facilitate putting some things behind a member login. It is very much still a work in progress, as we reconstruct what was on the old site and build new features. A few new things we hope members will like:

- A searchable member Directory. If you fill out your member profile, your fellow members can search for you by shared interest or geographical proximity. Not all of the information you share with the association will be public, though. We want your fellow members to know what city
and country you live in, and what your scholarly interests are, not your phone number and street address. The only contact information available will be the email address you list. You can upload a photo to help people recognize you when you finally meet in person.

- Member discussion forums. Not meant to take the place of the listserv, but discussion forums provide a more stable and durable way to communicate. You can subscribe to a forum if you want to be notified of new entries. We’ve created a few categories that we think members might find useful, and more can be created as needed. It’ll be a good place to hang a CFP or look for a roommate for a conference.

- Research and teaching resources. We had some of these on the old website, but we’re rebuilding to provide members with curated and annotated lists to the most helpful resources for scholarship and teaching.

The new site has tremendous potential, but like any such site, it will only become a community hub if SFRA members make it one. We know that will take some time. We’re all used to an SFRA website that’s fairly static, but the Executive Committee hopes that members will come to think of the site as a place to share information will fellow members, find opportunities for publication and participation, and connect with colleagues from across the globe.

VICE-PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE

“It’s Alive!”

Keren Omry

DEAR SFRA-ERS,

In a brief but rather self-indulgent turn to the personal this time, I will share with you that as I sit to write these words, I am a mere few days away from giving birth and am brought to think of the links between SF, birth, and creation. The ethics and the aesthetics of so-called natural and unnatural procreation have concerned the imaginations of SF writers and readers from its earliest days. From Mary Shelley’s electrically animated but rather grotesque sewing together of dead limbs to Huxley’s production-line test-tubes; from Octavia Butler’s man-borne blood child to the self-performed caesarean of Prometheus, clones, body-farming, or cyborg building, making life is a weird science indeed. Today we are witness to scientific research and applications which put to the test many of the most far-reaching ideas imagined by the SF world. Dolly may be old news but innovations, ranging from implanting a uterus in a man’s body to recent CRISPR/Cas techniques which enable localized shifts in the very genetics of an organism, shake the foundations of any perceived natural order of things. As I once again turn to my bookshelf for the comforts and discomforts of science fiction at a time of uncertainty and excitement – on levels that are personal, scientific, political, economic, environmental – I can only wonder what brave new worlds await.

SFRA Business

Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities

Anna McFarlane

SCIENCE FICTION has been concerned with medicine since its inception if, like Brian Aldiss, we consider that inception to be the publication of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein in 1818. Shelley looked at medical and scientific advances in electricity and galvanism, extrapolating from these the curiosity that rendered Victor Frankenstein’s ethics non-existent and created the monster that ultimately destroyed his life. This fascination with medicine and its ethics has been a continuing theme in science fiction through Brave New World’s (1932) eugenics and mind-suppressing drugs through the plagues and viruses that reanimate the dead in zombie films like 28 Days Later (2002). Recent contemporary future visions of healthcare increasingly dwell on inequality, as in 2013’s Elysium which shows a future in which health had been completely privatised and moved off-world to a living environment where the wealthy live without disease while the poor live short, squalid lives on Earth.

In recent years academic concerns with the intersections between medical ethics and technol-
ogy have particularly arisen through the field of the medical humanities. The growth of the discipline in Britain has been encouraged by the *BMJ Medical Humanities* journal, part owned by the British Medical Journal and part by the Institute for Medical Ethics. In an editorial for the journal, the editors of the time, David Greaves and Martyn Evans, describe the rise of medical humanities as:

a second generational response to the shortcomings of a medical culture dominated by scientific, technical and managerial approaches. The first response came in the 1960s and 1970s and led in Britain to the emergence of medical sociology, social history of medicine and medical ethics as academically respectable subdisciplines. The current response can then be seen as a new phase in which medical humanities is making its first appearance in Britain, and is also taking a new and related direction in North America. (2000: 1)

The academic discipline of the medical humanities aims to explore the ways in which humans (or, indeed, animals) come into contact with medicine, and how such encounters must change both living beings and medicine itself. This means that medical humanities can have points of overlap with disability studies, sociology, history, and philosophy. In North American universities it is sometimes offered as an element of medical school, as a means of teaching trainee doctors about listening to patients, considering patient perspectives and broadening the students’ idea of what a doctor should be. This idea, of taking elements from the humanities to improve medical training, has also gone the other way. Humanities scholars have taken their knowledge of their fields as a means of throwing new light on medicine and its social consequences, an early example of which might be Michel Foucault’s *Naisance de la Clinique* (*The Birth of the Clinic*, 1963), a text which (along with Foucault’s other work on institutions and disciplines) has had a deep influence on the field of the medical humanities.

In science fiction studies the links between humanity and medicine have been a topic of both literary and academic analysis. Most significantly, Donna Haraway’s readings of human-animal relationships through the figure of the Oncomouse (1997), or the confrontation she imagines between the machine and the human, between prostheses and augmentation, in ‘A Cyborg Manifesto’ (1991) have been particularly influential. Haraway’s writing reveals the radical potential of medical research by drawing the philosophical potential from the patriarchal, would-be objectivity of medical discourse. One could also draw attention to the academic discussion surrounding the figure of the posthuman and what it means for our culture. Philosophers including Jacques Derrida, Rosi Braidotti, Stefan Herbrechter, Cary Wolfe and N. Katherine Hayles are among the many who have joined this debate over the last few decades, often through reference to science fiction texts. Such discussions, while of course questioning the nature of ‘the human’, explore the definition of medicine. The difference between a medical intervention and a cybernetic augmentation becomes almost indistinguishable in the pages of a William Gibson novel, or in a film like *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) as Charлизе Theron discards her impressive prosthetic to sharpen her aim, using her handless arm to prop up her gun. In order to take a look at this crossover between science fiction and the medical humanities a new project at the University of Glasgow is combining concerns with medicine and its future with science fiction to establish how the two complement each other.

Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities is a research project based at the University of Glasgow and led by Dr Gavin Miller with research assistance from myself. The project aims to explore the links...
between this new academic field and science fiction from its inception (wherever one marks that occasion). It is funded by the Wellcome Trust as part of their remit to promote research that engages with medicine in innovative and imaginative ways, including through artistic approaches. As part of this artistic remit, the Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities project is holding a creative writing competition to be judged in part by science fiction author Adam Roberts. Roberts is a fitting choice for the role as his novels have explored themes relevant to the medical humanities. In *Land of the Headless* (2007) Roberts describes a planet ruled by theology; a civilisation advanced enough to take space travel for granted, but that punishes those who deviate from its diktats with beheading. Medical technology is used to keep the beheaded alive in a move that claims to be merciful despite its cruel grotesquery. Roberts uses this premise to challenge the common conflation of technological and ethical progress. Medicine and the human body are also at the forefront of *By Light Alone* (2011) in which nanotechnology is used to allow beings to photosynthesise. Removing the sharp edge of poverty by eradicating starvation might be utopian in the hands of some, but Roberts shows that this breakthrough throws the divide between rich and poor into stark relief as the two groups diverge into very different beings. The gendering of medicine and wellbeing is significant here as women still require nutrients from solid food during pregnancy. As well as writing science fiction in a variety of genres, Roberts is the author of *The History of Science Fiction* (2006), the most comprehensive long history of science fiction. Given these qualifications, we are very happy to have Adam Roberts as our guest judge and we are happy to announce that many of the entries he selects will go on to form a short story collection to be published by Glasgow-based Freight Books, leaving a lasting legacy to the medical humanities in science fiction.

The Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities project will also produce a special issue of *The BMJ Medical Humanities Journal* dedicated to the intersections between science fiction and the medical humanities. As a path-finding project we are interested in reading papers on a wide range of related topics but to give scholars some guidance, we are particularly asking for papers that engage with the biomedical technoscientific imaginary. In George E. Markus’s edited collection *Technoscientific Imaginaries* (1995) he considers the role of the imaginary for science practitioners, including clinicians, in the years before the millennium, explaining that scientists are constantly trying to understand the present by borrowing from a cautiously imagined emergent future, filled with volatility, and uncertainty, but in which faith in practices of technoscience become even more complexly and interestingly constructed in new locations of doing science. (4)

This understanding of the present, based on the view from an imagined future, is intensely familiar to scholars of science fiction studies and ripe for further academic exploration. We hope that our call for papers will prove inspiring for contributors and that the resulting special issue will offer a resource for further research.

In addition to these publications, a series of events will be held in Glasgow throughout the year including a workshop on ‘Science Fiction and the Public Engagement with Medicine’ on the 27th of November 2015. This first workshop features Jenny Kitzinger from the University of Cardiff who has already been looking at the role of science fiction as a discourse in media representations of health innovation (Kitzinger, 2010). Kitzinger will be speaking on ‘Science Fiction, Ethics and the Body: Clones, *Coma* Patients and Organ Harvesting’ which will include some of her recent work on Robin Cook’s novel *Coma* (1977) and its feature film adaptation of the same name (1978). We are also welcoming David Lawrence from the Costumed Visions of Enhanced Bodies project. This project, also funded by the Wellcome Trust, is a collaboration between the Institute for Science, Ethics and Innovation at the University of Manchester and the JK Mason Institute for Medicine, Life Sciences and Law at the University of Edinburgh. Lawrence will be introducing some of their perspectives on superheroes and the medical humanities through his presentation, ‘Costumed Visions of Enhanced Bodies: Ability, Humanity and the Science of the Superhero’. This first workshop will be followed by two others – ‘Science Fiction, Medicine and Utopia’ and ‘The Politics of Science Fiction Medicine’, both to be held in the new year.

The project will conclude with a full conference in the summer of 2016 for which a call for papers
will be released before Christmas. The conference will include the announcement of the winners of the creative writing competition by Adam Roberts and will provide a platform for the first full discussion on what the fields of science fiction studies and the medical humanities have to offer one another.

*The project’s first workshop was held on the 27th of November 2015 at the University of Glasgow and is entitled ‘Science Fiction and Public Engagement with Medicine’. For more information please tweet us @scifimedhums, visit scifimedhums.glasgow.ac.uk, or email arts-scifimedhums@glasgow.ac.uk.*

**Works Cited**


Kitzinger, Jenny. ‘Questioning the sci-fi alibi: a critique of how “science fiction fears” are used to explain away public concerns about risk’, *Journal of Risk Research* 13(1) (2010):73 - 86.


MOST SCHOLARS believe cosmic horror of the modern era is a direct descendant of the cosmic horror fiction of the 1940s. While true new cosmic horror stories are set in a universe similar to the one imagined by Lovecraft, one where humans are insignificant in comparison to the rest of creation, modern cosmic horror stories depart from their predecessors in a significant way. Rather than presenting human insignificance as a source of despair, new cosmic horror celebrates the power of individuals to protect their community even if doing so ultimately proves to be a futile effort. Though apparent in various media, the most prevalent representation of this new perspective appears in the tabletop roleplaying medium. This medium's fertile creative grounds utilizes themes from literature, techniques from film, and interactive gameplay similar to video games, all the while combining rapid user response to foster an easier observation of this new emerging genre.

The beginnings of cosmic horror and Lovecraftian fiction stem from the weird genre of the mid-20th century. So too is the modern cosmic horror genre connected to the often-contentious New Weird genre of the 21st century. The delineation of this new genre, the New Weird, appeared after several authors felt certain science fiction stories of the 21st century were of a wholly distinct literary styling from other narratives of the time [1]. Highly debated, New Weird arose from the combination of elements found in two modern science fiction genres. This new genre, individuals claimed, combined the already blurred lines of fantasy and science fiction of slipstream and interstitial science fiction with elements and narratives found in the horror genre. This new genre explored themes and narratives similar to the weird genre of the 1940s, but with a modern viewpoint and mindset. Due to the similarities between the two genres, the authors called the new genre the New Weird [2].

New Weird is the result of the constant evolution of genres. While seemingly similar to its predecessor, upon closer inspection New Weird was a wholly different entity than the 1940s weird genre. However, 1940s weird was also a source of numerous sub-genres, so does the same hold true of New Weird? Yes; cosmic horror and Lovecraftian fiction is a staple of modern culture, but similar to New Weird, modern narratives of the genre have a similar appearance yet follow different principles. Modern cosmic horror media, especially tabletop gaming, utilize a different mentality than found in previous works of cosmic horror.

To understand why we are witnessing the birth of a new genre, first we must understand why cosmic horror and Lovecraftian fiction has seen a resurgence in modern culture. The perviousness of Lovecraftian media stems from the mirroring of the socio-political environment of Interwar America and Great Recession America. This view is best summarized in “Things We Were Not Meant to Know: H.P. Lovecraft and Cosmic Horror” by Mack Knopf:

Now, in the twenty-first century, the tenor of the times of the ‘30s has come around again, with fear of science, of knowledge, and of the unknown; even when science enlightens us, there are many who do not like the answers it provides. There is little room for religion in the methodology of science, and materialism tends not to admit the evidence of the spirit world. Science is also not easy to understand -- it is frequently counterintuitive (the sun does not revolve around the earth), and many of its discoveries take training to understand. More and more people turn to “pseudoscience” as a result, as we can see from the proliferation of theories of Atlantis (few want to hear it might be an island called Thera destroyed by a volcano), the alien-abduction phenomenon, and other conspiracy theories. Religious sects proliferate as answers are sought, just as in Lovecraft’s time. [3]

As Knopf demonstrates, individuals of the 1930s relate more closely to modern people than one might initially believe. However, despite the similar conditions, one of the major changes that have come about in the past 85 years has been through our means and sources of entertainment. While in the 1930s entertainment focused largely on literature, dancing, and the novelty of sound and color film and its rapid de-
In its infancy, video game horror design was challenging because designers had to create visuals capable of illustrating the horror within the narrative and gameplay move congruent to the narrative. *Mystery House* (Sierra 1980) [4], popularly considered to be the first horror game, was released on Apple II and DOS. A murder mystery game, the goal of *Mystery House* was for the player to explore an abandoned Victorian mansion and eventually discover the murderer of other characters who appear in the game. While a good start, the simple line art and command prompt interface severely hamper the horror aspects of the game.

Eventually, game designers achieve success by using the unique aspects of video games and working within the confines of underdeveloped technology. Series such as *Resident Evil* (Capcom 1996) [5], *Silent Hill* (Konami 1999) [6], and *Fatal Frame* (Temco 2001) [7] all worked with, rather than against, the limitations of their technology to create horrific experiences for the players. *Resident Evil*’s set camera angles, while disorientating, framed the scares players might miss if they had free control over the camera. *Silent Hill* used the generation’s limited rendering distance to create foggy landscapes obscuring the player’s view, creating a confining atmosphere which heightened the tension while hiding asset pop in and graphical problems. *Fatal Frame* utilized gameplay that forced the player to become helpless in order to confront the ghosts rampant within the game, rewarding the player for actively seeking out the ghost by waiting until the last possible second to attempt to capture them.

A common problem with modern horror games is the demand for high fidelity graphics often results in higher production costs. Since horror is a niche genre, AAA game designers must dilute the horrific elements of their game with other genres in order to ensure a wider audience appeal and a return on their heavy financial investment. The best example of the technological issues of the current generation is the *Silent Hill HD Collection* (Konami 2012) [8]. Even with the increased computational power found in modern video game technology, the designers were unable to render the game’s iconic fog properly. To compensate, the release tried to work to recreate the effect with current technology, but the result is a patchy fog that does not render as precisely as the original game. Textures and assets from the original game can be seen floating in space or popping into existence as the players approach them. Another example, this time relating to the genre dilution, is the *Dead Space* franchise (Electronic Arts, Inc. 2008-2013) [9]. The original *Dead Space* (Electronic Arts, Inc. 2008) [10] took cues from numerous other modern horror franchises: the abandoned spaceship and isolation of the player mimic the *Alien* franchise [11], the enemy necromorphs draw heavily on the body horror of 1982s *The Thing* [12], and the overall meta-plot of the franchise draws on aspects of the cosmic horror genre. Unfortunately, as the series progressed the series had turned less about survival and dread and more about action and combat. By *Dead Space 3* (Electronic Arts, Inc. 2013) [13], the series had devolved into a modern sci-fi shooter with only window dressings of its original horrific atmosphere remaining. The horrific elements were there, the necromorphs were still part of the story, but the main conflict lacked any dread or tension compared with the previous games.

By way of contrast, independent game designers attempt to maximize the appeal of pure horror games by employing well-established theories of fear drawn from the history of video games and psychology. *The Five Nights at Freddy’s* series (Scottgames 2014-2015) [14], *Cry of Fear Half-life Mod* (2012) and *Game* (Team Psykskallar 2013) [15], and *Yume Nikki* (2004) [16], all create horror experiences with minimal technological processes. Attracted to their simplicity and open source code, many of these indie developers eschew more expensive and developed game design engines for those such as Unity, RPG Maker, and Source in order to craft their horror experiences, turning limitation into strength, just like their predecessors.

As described by authors Oliver and Cantor in their article “Developmental Differences in Responses to Horror” [17], designers attempt to maximize the horror of their games by mapping certain elements to the fears of differently aged players. From early
childhood (ages 3 to 8 years old), the core elements that scare an individual are animals, the dark, supernatural beings, and the physical scariness of an object. These core elements evolve and mature until adolescence (age 13+) where physical destruction, social fears, and other abstract ideas and elements become the focus of an individual’s fears. By constructing games that weave all these elements, developers create multifaceted horror experiences that can appeal to users of all ages.

Another way independent game designers can provoke horror in players is through repeated cognitive association. Described as similar to a demolition charge, “In the Dark of Your Own Psyche: Jungian Theory and Horror” [18] details how individuals can be “primed” for certain horrific narratives. In the article White describes how the rise of the slasher films of the 80s were in direct correlation to horrific experiences in the viewing audience’s past. These slasher films were a combination and culmination of fears experienced by the public during the 70s because of the numerous serial killers and political murders of that decade. White’s other example, 1992’s *Candyman*, is another such film that plays on the audience’s fears. The major difference between the slasher films and *Candyman* is that *Candyman* played to the racial and cultural fears of the audience. These fears were more obfuscated than those found in slasher films, but, in White’s opinion, create a better, more complex horror film. White warns about making horror narratives too complex. *Candyman*, he stated, was a victim of its own success as the complex nature of these cultural and racial fears left the audiences in a state of displaced horror. Unsure of why they were scared and what type of catharsis they should be experiencing, the viewing audience walked away uneasy with the experience and unwilling to re-watch it. Oliver and Cantor also observed a style of priming in their study [17]. Individuals exposed to an image of a fire and then a regular, non-threatening image became fearful a fire related incident would befall the contents of the non-threatening image, in essence priming the observer for future horror.

Individuals can experience burnout with the horror genre. Jeff VanderMeer’s burnout with the 1980s Splatterpunk movement in literary horror exemplifies this phenomenon. The article, “Horror: Dead or Alive? A Discussion of the Current Horror Malaise” [19] uses key phrases including “Fiction is about people, sympathetic people and yet the root of current horror malaise lies in most horror writers’ inability to recognize this for themselves” [19] and “Horror has declared itself the ‘literature of scares’ over both ideas and character” [19]. The author Jeff VanderMeer, who later became a vocal proponent of the New Weird genre [2], details how horror of that decade focused on visual shocks and graphic details while ignoring the human condition. The focus was on the shock of horror instead of the characters. “The smallness of humanity against the larger backdrop of a hostile universe. The incredible metallic beauty of a universe powered solely by the intellect. The heart can only rebel against such a universe,” [19] stands out as a key phrase. This rebellion is the core of the modern cosmic horror genre.

Modern audiences are primed to the idea of cosmic horror, but want desire delivered in a postmodern style. The knowledge individuals can be primed for horror stimuli explains the recent resurgence of Lovecraftian fiction. Individuals raised during the new millennium have been primed to fear the ideals explored in Lovecraft’s original works, but the classical style of writing used by Lovecraft does not elicit the reactions modern readers desire. Instead modern cosmic horror implements a postmodern style of horror; ones that according to “Five Characteristics of Postmodern Horror” [20] follow five characteristics: 1) A violent disruption of the everyday world, 2) a transgression and violation of boundaries, 3) the validity of rationality is questioned, 4) refusal of narrative closure, and 5) bounded experience of fear.

A number of characteristics of Lovecraftian horror mirror those of postmodern horror already and it is striking how most of these characteristics were already present in the original cosmic horror genre. Right away, characteristics one through three is already present in most Cosmic Horror stories. The everyday world is a self-perpetuated charade created by humanity to keep it from being overwhelmed by a universe our rational minds cannot comprehend. As T.S. Miller explains in “From Bodily Horror to Cosmic Horror (and Back Again): The Tentacle Monster from Primordial Chaos to Hello Cthulhu” [21], the monsters and horror of Lovecraft combine bodily horror and cosmic horror so much that a tentacle monster can be seen as both an otherworldly object and a deformed mutilated human appendage at the same time.

The reason for the shared thematic characteris-
tics between postmodern horror and cosmic horror is the fact the creatures of cosmic horror play on both the physiological and psychological fears of the individual. T.S. Hall [21] offers a possible explanation why Cosmic Horror and postmodern horror are so similar. Using language and ideas similar to those in White’s article [18], T.S. Hall explores why tentacle monsters such as Cthulhu and other horror monsters are so effective in scaring people in the 20th century. He states, “As the dragon dominates an earlier epoch in the West as the embodiment of the fearsome unknown; 20th century may well be called the Century of the Tentacle Monster” [21]. The conclusion White reaches is that these monsters are the best representation for the Shadow archetype as described by Jung. This archetype allows people to reflect and question themselves, much as they do within horror media. These entities are alien, but at the same time they contain enough, possibly imagined, human characteristics to fascinate us and force us to explore ourselves.

As with all media, this exploration can encroach on subjects individuals do not want to consider. The boundaries surrounding horror experiences keep people from reacting poorly but the bounded experience of fear is something horror game designers should utilize cautiously. As a designer and game master of tabletop roleplaying games, the game master (GM) has the ability to blur the lines of a game. Being able to read and scare both your players and their characters is a powerful tool at the GM’s disposal, but it still needs to be bound for the players’ benefit. Sometimes the boundaries set-up to keep an individual separated from the narrative blur and falter, upsetting the person in unexpected and unintended ways. The extreme reactions individuals have to the Oculus Rift and similar immersion systems highlight the possible dangers arising from blurring the boundaries between fiction and reality in a horror experience. This pushing of boundaries is a necessary aspect of horror though, a sentiment expressed by numerous authors in a variety of venues [19] [20] [21]. Extra Credits, originally an online video series meant to discuss game design topics, in particular dedicates several videos to the discussion of horror as a study on helplessness, in the process exploring humanity’s reaction to being helpless and the reactions one has to the cause of such helplessness [22].

The updated narratives and themes of modern cosmic horror that utilize the postmodern horror characteristics are most apparent in the tabletop roleplaying game (RPG) medium. This medium combines design elements of film, literature, and video games into a distinct media form. Notable examples of this new cosmic horror in roleplaying games include Delta Green (DG) [23], Warhammer 40,000 (40k) [24], Little Fears Nightmare Edition (LFNE) [25], and Monsters and other Childish Things (MaoCT) [26]. Each of these systems involve narratives and mechanics that utilized the characteristics of the postmodern horror genre.

These systems deal with entities outside the realm of human understanding with unfathomable powers, and yet each of these systems subverts the themes of the original cosmic horror genre in some subtle way. DG and 40k deal with stemming the inevitable tide of universal forces through communal actions and self-sacrifice, LFNE shows that learning about and understanding a situation or entity can cause its terror inducing aspects to lose their power, and MaoCT utilizes a unique method of defeating beings beyond human understanding. All these RPG systems question the rules and boundaries the old cosmic horror genre held sacred.

The Call of Cthulhu (CoC) RPG system is the bastion of the old cosmic horror mindset [27]. By the end of the adventure, players expect their character to die or be irreparably insane. Often times players are encouraged to create backup characters for the inevitable point when their starting character becomes unplayable. Some of the modern RPG systems inspired by Lovecraft are actually bleaker narratively than CoC for various reasons. Trail of Cthulhu, based in the Gumshoe RPG system, focused its design on investigation. Players spend their skill points as a resource to uncover dues and mysteries, but in the end, the mechanics of Trail of Cthulhu actively degrade the characters’ capabilities of surviving in the world. Cthulhu Dark, a parody of Call of Cthulhu games, has players go through sometimes up to five characters in a session and the value of human life is little more than what is the most humorous outcome to an archetypical cosmic horror situation or scenario.

Unlike Trail of Cthulhu and Cthulhu Dark, Delta Green is a departure from the Call of Cthulhu system. Delta Green was originally a CoC setting written by Adam Scott Glancy, Dennis Detwiller, and John Tynes [26]. Drawing direct inspiration from Call of Cthulhu, Delta Green utilizes CoC’s d100 system, requiring
players to roll under their skills to succeed or, in the case of a contested roll, lower than the opposition. Delta Green (DG) is currently in the process of becoming a standalone RPG system to “create a game tailored specifically to Delta Green and its vision of the Cthulhu Mythos…” [28].

Set in the world of Lovecraft’s writings, Delta Green’s founding premise is how the US government would react to the discovery of mythos creatures. [23] Players explore through the DG organization the government’s attempts to protect citizens from Lovecraftian knowledge and the threats of such, ranging from cultists to mythos creatures to the Elder Gods themselves.

Both DG and CoC systems are about individual people’s attempts to stop cosmic horror. Both systems usually end in the death of at least one, if not all, of the player characters but that is where the similarities end. Where Call of Cthulhu is most similar to Aliens [11], a horror mystery series, Delta Green is more comparable to Predators [29], a horror action franchise. The greatest divergence between the two appears in the types of characters native to each setting. In Call of Cthulhu the player characters are individuals witnessing what is behind the veil of the universe and ultimately end up being nothing more than a mere irritant to the greater forces of their universe. Characters are generally low-trained individuals, often police officers, reporters, or scientists, who encounter supernatural situations that often end in a mutually exclusive choice between solving the problem and surviving. In contrast, Delta Green is usually about trained individuals from a military background, enlisted into the titular organization as a result of their outstanding services or for surviving (or sometimes even triumphing over) an encounter with the unknown. They engage in impossible missions far beyond any one person’s scope with the ultimate goal of keeping humanity safe from the evils beyond the realm of human understanding. Unfortunately for the character, whenever there is a choice of survival or completing the mission, DG asks them to place priority on solving the situation over personal survival. This often manifests in DG agents sacrificing themselves to protect or divert trouble away from unknowing civilians.

Call of Cthulhu is about individuals with little to no outside help and no way of warning one another what is going on. Delta Green is about a network of people solving problems an ordinary Call of Cthulhu or 1940s cosmic horror character could not. The cosmic horror of Delta Green is still bleak, but there is a sense of community explored and underpinned to the stories, particularly in how by working together people can hold the tide, if only for a little while, very similar to our next RPG system, Warhammer 40,000.

Perhaps best known for its Science Fantasy tabletop war games, Warhammer 40,000 (40k) is bleak to the point of comedic. The universe is constantly at war with numerous factions including, but not limited to: Humans, religious zealotry for their God Emperor; Orks, sentient fungus who love “waaaahg”; and Tyranids, sentience evolving Bioweapons [24]. Each of these factions vies for power in a broken universe, interwoven with another. The Warp is a hellish landscape ruled by four entities, termed Chaos Gods, each patron an aspect of this tumultuous dimension. Constantly at war with itself and the known universe, the Warp regularly bleeds in and out of the main universe, wreaking havoc leaving widespread death and destruction in its wake. Given that a Warp Incursion, set off by a bad dice roll or the whim of the GM, can kill off millions of people in a single stroke, the 40k universe is arguably one of the bleakest, blackest settings to date. Again, however, like Delta Green, there is a sense of community to it coupled with the idea that general knowledge of the unknowable is not enough to break an individual and rather, it is the specifics that is so dangerous.

Although there are many different settings for in the 40k universe, they all utilize the d100 roll under system similar to CoC and DG. The player chooses a stat or skill, adds bonuses from feats and talents, and then attempts to roll under the finalized number. Of the many systems in the 40k universe, Dark Heresy [30] provides the clearest parallel to Delta Green. Here, as in Delta Green, individuals face otherworldly threats in defense of the human empire. Scale is important here, because other systems in the 40k gaming universe deal with massive planetary scale events such as Chaos invasions. Like Delta Green, Dark Heresy is more concerned with solving small-scale mysteries and stopping the threat at all costs, including their lives.

Personal sacrifice for the salvation of others is rampant in the 40k setting. Individuals connected to the Warp use their powers to create psychic bubbles around spaceships to enable humanity to travel faster than light. People with no connection to the Warp, considered literally soulless individuals in 40k lore,
use their ability to hunt down and deal with entities of the Warp even though the populace hate and despise them. 40k for all its comedic bleakness ultimately sides on the ideals of community standing together to hold back the otherworldly powers that rule the universe so others may live.

*Little Fears Nightmare Edition* is a system about childhood terrors [25], dedicated to exploring how perception shapes reality for children. The system utilizes a top three exploding d6 system where the game master assigns a target number (TN) to a task and the player rolls a number of six sided dice equal to their Stat, plus corresponding Quality, either positive or negative. Dice that land on a six “explode” and are rerolled, adding the new results to the previous roll’s total. The players keep their top three rolls and exceeding or failing a check by steps of three provides bonuses or penalties based on the actions.

The concept of belief is utilized by the system as a representation of the character’s ability to believe in objects with such conviction they are able to imbue otherwise imaginary powers on them. For example, by believing in a pair of shoes, a character can run faster than another character or by believing in another person and cheering them on, that person becomes more competent at a task. However, belief is both a boon and a curse; it may allow characters and players to overcome challenges with creative thinking but it also creates obstacles and monsters. For example, a rabid three-headed dog guarding a junkyard. In game, the players believe this dog guards the entrance to the underworld, but as the events of the game unfold, the hound is revealed to be much like “The ”Beast” in the Sandlot movie [31]: nothing more than an old, scary looking dog the children believed was a monster. The power of imagination and belief warped the dog into a monster the characters can only overcome by facing and realizing their fears.

The mechanics of *Little Fears* dictate monsters will remain dangerous until you remove their terror; the quality created by the children’s belief makes it scary. The idea of facing your fear, the unknown, and slowly overcoming it is an ideal commonly used by new cosmic horror authors. Of course, there are still things which are unbeatable and unknowable, but that does not mean one cannot overcome at least some of the opposition through teamwork and a willingness to stretch and reconsider one’s perception of the reality.

More interestingly however, is the second way of dealing with monsters in *Little Fears*: giving them what they want. An example from the sourcebook is the zombie who has only stated goal is to fix its desecrated headstone. The stats and abilities for this creature are formidable, he proves to be more than a challenge for even seasoned players, but understanding what the entity wants, and appeasing it is a possible route to solving the entirety of the scenario non-violently. This is not always the case: another monster from the sourcebook desires the flesh of children and another wants to kidnap as many as possible, but the ability to investigate non-human entities and resolve a situation diplomatically is a large step previous narratives of cosmic horror avoided or outright disregarded.

*Monsters and other Childish Things* (*MaoCT*) is at once a cosmic horror setting and not. The sourcebook uses the ideas of Lovecraftian fiction but wraps it in a Saturday morning cartoon package, with the game’s elevator pitch going so far as to be “Calvin and Hobbes meets Call of Cthulhu” [26]. The game provides players with the ability to create entities or powers similar in scale to anything Lovecraft could dream up. Players who choose to play a “monster kid” take the role of characters bonded to a Lovecraftian horror while simultaneously struggling to emotionally mature and keep a best friend who cannot comprehend humanity from eating their neighbor’s cat [32].

The system uses the One Roll Engine (ORE) rolling mechanic. Players and GMs roll a number of 10-sided dice equal to their character’s Stat plus an associated Skill or, in the case of monsters, a dice pool tied to an appropriate location. Matching pairs of dice equate to a success where higher matching numbers, two tens being the best, correlate to a more accurate action, and a “wider” roll, such as three ones or four sevens, represent a faster action. As simple as the dice mechanics are, the system encourages GMs to focus more on the consequences of using powers and monsters to solve a character’s problems.

Within the unusual *MaoCT* system is the core of how new cosmic horror rebels against the “cold mechanical world” expressed by Vandermeer [19]. Within the rules and narrative of the system there is the ability to take a “chunk” from a monster when “defeating” it. This chunk represents the loss of a die from a monster’s dice pool. At creation, monsters are given fifty points to spend on skills and abilities, so the loss of one or two dice in a location ranges
from insignificant to annoying, but never deadly. Furthermore, “chunking a monster” is only available if a monster is running away and another monster is present and able to tear off a piece of the fleeing creature; think of a Frankenstein’s monster sewing an extra arm onto its torso or a bear monster consuming the flesh of a humanoid creature and stealing its ability to speak. This idea of slowly destroying an overwhelming horror by ripping it apart piece by piece over hundreds, or even thousands, of encounters strictly flies in the face of what we have come to know and expect of Lovecraftian horror. As stated in Extra Credits, “to make it possible for Cthulhu to bleed... is to give the player some shred of hope that they might have a chance...” [33]

There is a marked difference between the cosmic horror created in the 1940s and today. The belief and knowledge we are capable of creating setbacks for entities greater than ourselves has emerged. Protagonists recognize their insignificance to the known universe and expose themselves to forces beyond time and space, but their lives are just as trivial and worthless to the broader universe as they were before the unknowable revealed itself. They emerge from these encounters with world ending terrors, scarred, but unbroken, because much like their own life, there is little to no escape from the inevitable. Their lives are ultimately meaningless, but by the simple act of trying to resist, they can provide a sense of hope and future to others who they feel are more significant.

This evolution of the cosmic horror genre may be due to the appearance of New Weird or the influence of mechanics on genre evolution. Further study is necessary within specific areas of research such as the technological difference between Interwar American and Great Recession America and the inclusion of media outside of tabletop gaming culture such as the John Dies in the End movie and book [34][35], or video games such as Bloodborne (FromSoftware, Inc. 2015) [36]. Either way, there is no doubt something has changed within the cosmic horror genre. Perhaps the answers are waiting behind a veil that, once wrenched free, will shatter our minds and our perceptions of the universe; we will have to see.

Works Cited

Sentience in Science Fiction 101
Mariella Scerri and Victor Grech

Oxford Dictionaries defines sentience as the ability to perceive or feel. Bortolotti and Harris emphasise the distinction between the capacity to have experiences and react appropriately to external stimuli (sentience) and the additional capacity to be aware of oneself as a distinct individual whose existence began sometime in the past and will extend into the future (self-consciousness). The authors contend that reactive behaviour without intentionality is not ‘sentience’ as it does not involve phenomenal consciousness and is merely the capacity to react to external stimuli. Plants and computers have this property without being aware of the qualitative aspects of the stimuli they react to. Having phenomenal conscious experiences requires the awareness of some qualitative aspects (or qualia) of the experiences, for instance the brightness of a colour one perceives visually (Dennett).

Another characterization of sentience is the capacity to feel emotions, such as pain or pleasure. While plants and computers react to external stimuli, they do not feel emotions. This concept is central to the philosophy of animal rights, since sentience is necessary for the ability to suffer, and is thus held to confer certain rights. Indeed, Ned Block asserts that ‘fundamentally different physical realization from us per se is not a ground of rational belief in lack of consciousness’ (Block 392). Furthermore, Marc Bekoff believes that humans are not exceptional or alone in the arena of sentience. He insists that we need to abandon the anthropocentric view that only big-brained animals such as ourselves, non-human great apes, elephants and cetaceans have sufficient mental capacity for complex forms of sentience and consciousness.

In science fiction, an alien, android, robot, hologram or computer described as ‘sentient’ is usually treated in the same way as a human being. Foremost among these properties is human level intelligence (sapience) but sentient characters also typically display desire, will, consciousness, ethic, personality, insight and humour. Sentience is used in this context to describe an essential human property that unites all of these other qualities. The words ‘sapience’, ‘self-awareness’ and ‘consciousness’ are used in similar ways and sometimes – and confusingly –
interchangeably in science fiction.

This genre has explored several other forms of consciousness besides that of humanity, along with the way in which such minds might perceive and function. In “The Pinocchio Syndrome and the Prosthetic Impulse in Science Fiction,” Grech (2012) opines that three components constitute the mental and psychological aspects that define man; ‘the desire to acquire ‘qualia’, the expression of intentional- ity; and an application of an Abraham Maslow-type motivational pyramid, with a desire for self-actuali- sation that embraces the desire to attain humanity’.

These three facets, Grech notes, are demonstrated through the character Data in Star Trek. Those who meet Commander Data are reasonably sure that he is conscious. However, finding out that he is not hu- man does not cancel that ground for rational belief in his consciousness. Block argues that ‘the root of the epistemic problem is that the example of consciousness on which it is inevitably based is us. But how can science based on us generalize to creatures that do not share our physical properties?’ (Block 295).

Block furthermore claims that naturalism asserts that the default position is that Commander Data, being an artificial construct, is not conscious. On the other hand, disjunctivism allows that if Commander Data is conscious, shared phenomenality is consti- tuted by the possibility of having Commander Data’s electronic or electro-chemical realization of our functional state.

Such debates can provide a basis and a frame- work for the issues of sentience and non-sentience that arise in science fiction narratives. The trope of sentience is mooted in Frankenstein, which is said to be the first Science Fiction novel (Aldiss). The mon- ster’s sapience is raised throughout the book with several interjections by the monster himself with regard to feelings of rejection and loneliness. On the other hand, Frankenstein’s ambivalence toward his creation reinforces the frankly callous scepticism he held toward the monster as a sentient life form. In- deed, the monster remains unnamed and is instead referred to as ‘monster,’ ‘creature,’ ‘demon,’ ‘devil,’ ‘fiend,’ ‘witch’ and ‘it.’

Fast forward in time, readers of science fiction frequently encounter the same ambivalence in the treatment of sentience in science fiction narratives. The notion of advanced robots with human-type intelligence has been mooted for decades. Samuel Butler was the first to raise this issue, in a number of articles contributed to a local periodical in New Zealand and later developed into the three chapters of his novel Erewhon. Various scenarios have been proposed for categorizing the general themes dealing with artificial intelligence in science fiction. The main approaches are AI dominance, human domi- nance and sentience. This paper aims to analyse how sentience is treated in Viehl’s Star Doc Series, particularly in the first book in the series, Star Doc, as well as in specific episodes in Star Trek.

**Sentence in Viehl’s Star Doc**

Doctor Cherijo Grey Veil is a doctor and surgeon who accepts a position as a physician at Kevarzan- ga-2’s Free Clinic. Her surgical expertise is desper- ately needed on this frontier world with over two hundred sentient species, and her understanding of alien physiology is a consequence of a keen intelli- gence and an eidetic memory. But there is a hidden truth behind her expertise. Dr Cherijo is a genetically enhanced clone, an experiment conducted by her fa- ther who is the archetypal cold, calculating and ruth- less scientist-physician. It transpires that Dr. Cherijo was the first successful outcome after ten unsuccess- ful attempts. She is superhuman with a superior ca- pacity for learning and an enhanced immune system which transcends that of mundane humanity.

The denial of this individual’s sentience reaches its denouement with a rigorous four day trial, and the decision for subsequent deportment of the pro- tagonist to Earth because it has been proven that her ex- istence, the result of Joseph Grey Veil’s experimenta- tion and his violation of the “Genetic Exclusivity Act” breaks ‘Section nine, paragraphs two through four’ of the League’s Treatise which prohibits such experi- ments.

Her only minimal chance for an appeal, as sug- gested by Dr Mayer, chief medical officer, is to petition to the ruling council with an emergency request to be declared a sentient being. The protagonist is ‘a clone-created, modified, trained being observed during an extended experiment. You are not classi- fied as human or sentient. You are Joseph Grey Veil’s property.’ Being genetically enhanced during embry- onic development, she is deemed unclassifiable as the “Genetic Exclusivity Act” has been breached.

The best reason for Cherijo to be declared sentient is given by nurse Ecla. She claims that non-sentient life forms do not have the ability to understand the meaning of death. Nonetheless, during an epidemic,
Dr Grey was seen many times ‘holding a dead child in her arms, and praying to her God for that lost little soul.’ What is even more bigoted in Dr Grey Veil’s trial is the criteria for which she did not meet and thus denied sentient status: she had not been conceived, gestated or delivered by natural or legally sanctioned methods; was in possession of ‘enhancement deliberately bred by experimentation’; and never been allowed to live freely. These three main criteria move away from the epistemology of consciousness per se. However, Block debates the role of functional similarity in providing evidence that others are like us in intrinsic physical respects, and that is the ground for our belief in other minds.

Throughout the Star Doc series we encounter other life forms with similar issues related to sentience. The sentience status of a Chakacat called Alunthri, a human sized cat with human-equivalent intellectual abilities and language skills is raised and debated in Star Doc. Chakacats ‘once captured and trained’ are sold as domesticates [...] there is some controversy about their classification. Effort by Council petition to have them recognized as sentient life forms have been consistently denied’ (Viehl 80).

The deliberate stance taken by Dr Grey Veil is ‘Alunthri, I couldn’t treat you like a domesticated companion. In my eyes you are sentient’ (Viehl 185), which parallels Block’s arguments in favour of sentience. This occurs when Alunthri seeks her assistance to transfer him under her ownership. Without deed, under the terms of the current colonial charter, he would be shipped back to his home world and resold. He specifically asked for Veil’s ownership because he knew that Veil would give him this freedom. The working definition of sentience comes into full force here where the ability to feel, perceive or to experience subjectivity is most palpable.

Sentience in Star Trek

Similar issues about sentience also arise in Star Trek. In 2365, Phillipa Louvois of the Judge Advocate General’s Office held a hearing in which she decided that Data was not the property of Starfleet. During the hearing the question of an android’s sentience came up but there was no formal, legal resolution on the matter (TNG: “The Measure of Man,” Scheerer). Despite a lack of official acknowledgement, Data thought himself to be sentient and many others agreed. (TNG, “The Offspring,” Frakes; “The Most Toys,” Bond) so much so that as of 2371, Data was considered the only sentient artificial lifeform in Federation Society (VOY, “Prototype,” Frakes).

From time to time other non-android life forms or artificial intelligences have also been considered sentient. In the episode “Warhead” (Kretchmer), a weapon was so sophisticated that it was considered sentient. Holograms have also been referred to as both artificial lifeforms and ‘sentient.’ One such sentient hologram was created on the USS Enterprise – D in 2365, when Lieutenant Commander Geordie La Forge requested that the holodeck create an opponent worthy of Data in a Sherlock Holmes style mystery. The ship’s computer produced a sentient version of James Moriarty, Holmes’ nemesis.

A legal case related to holographic sentience arose with the Voyager Doctor when he attempted to publish a holonovel entitled “Photons Be Free,” but it was appropriated and released without his permission by his publisher. The legal issue revolved around whether the doctor was an ‘artist’ within the meaning of the laws that granted rights to control the dissemination of intellectual property. The ruling was narrow in that the definition of artist in that single law was extended to a hologram, but it was an important step on the path toward granting full legal status to a hologram as a sentient entity (VOY, “Author, Author,” Livingstone).

Non-humanoid non-carbon based life forms are also accorded this courtesy. In “The Devil in the Dark” (Pevney), Captain Kirk senses a Horta’s intelligence – a silicon-based life form who backs off when Kirk raises his phaser while displaying a wound from an earlier encounter. Consequently, Spock initiates a Vulcan mind meld to communicate with the creature. He learns that it is a sentient creature and is in extreme pain. The Horta learns enough to etch the ambiguous ‘NO KILL I’ into the floor. Another mind meld reveals that the Horta is preparing for the extinction of its race. It directed the humans to “the Chamber of the Ages.” Kirk tells Mr Spock to communicate to the creature that they are trying to help. He goes to the Chamber and finds a million silicon spheres, which Kirk and Spock now understand are eggs ready to hatch.

The extended respect for the silicon based life form shown by both Captain Kirk and Mr Spock is a philosophical concept espoused by the modern philosopher Tom Regan. Regan argues that life matters to the individual, whether human or otherwise, and for the sake of consistency, respect for non-human
life should always be endorsed. Regan (2004) opines that rational and non-rational beings, earthly or alien, must be treated with Regan’s ‘respect principle’ or ‘subjects-of-a-life’ and should never be merely treated as means to the ends of others (Regan).

Discussion

The treatment of sentience in science fiction narratives has been a cause of ambivalence toward acceptance of sentient non-human life forms and their quest for human rights, with both the legal and ethical implications that this may bring.

In *Star Doc* and *Star Trek*, the same hesitancy to accept sentient life forms is encountered. Both Doctor Cherijo and Data are artificial life forms. Doctor Cherijo is the result of a successful laboratory experiment carried out by her father, while Commander Data is an android possessing excessive rationalism and incapable of conveying emotions. The notion of being regarded as the ‘Other’ is explicit throughout various incidents culminating in the trials they both had to undergo. These implications seem to suggest that while science fiction narratives acknowledge sapience and sentience in other life forms, these same narratives resist giving the prescribed rights, both ethical and legal, which are automatically attributed to human beings.

The recent film *Ex Machina* written and directed by Alex Garland implies the same resistance in elevating man-made life forms to human levels of regard. *Ex Machina* takes us into the not too distant future where a genius billionaire has created the world’s first fully sentient artificial intelligence, in the beguiling female form of Ava. He invites a low level employee Caleb to his remote laboratory home to apply the Turing Test to his creation. The film tries to marry the juxtaposition inherent in the central idea that the machine is man-made, but that Caleb is there to wonder if intelligence is necessarily human, and whether she has human-type intelligence. Ava is not fully robotic nor fully skinned or human, thus the viewers are constantly reminded that she is still a machine.

Issues on sentience in these narratives lend themselves to contemporary debates such as stem cell research, personhood and sentience. In their paper ‘Stem Cell Research, Personhood and Sentience,’ Bartolotti and Harris claim that in ordinary language we identify persons with human beings but the notion of a person is not co-extensive with the notion of a human being. More specifically, whereas an individual counts as a human being if it belongs to the species *Homo Sapiens*, it counts as a person not by virtue of species membership, but of the capacities it possesses. Bartoletti and Harris contend that empirical studies rule out that human embryos and foetuses are persons, as they do not satisfy the requirements for personhood i.e. rationality and self-consciousness. The conclusion is that it is immoral to prevent the development of an embryo because the embryo has the potential to become a person. This relies on the assumption that one should treat a potential person as one treats a person. However, there are direct moral obligations toward persons by virtue of their interests in their own well-being. Is it justified to grant the same moral status to early embryos that have no interests in their own well-being?

On the other hand, according to the principle of human dignity, in a formulation that can be found in Kant (1785), human life should never be thought of merely as a means but always also as an end. Inspired by Kant’s formulations, some might argue that human embryos cannot be treated just as a means to further research as this would violate the principle of human dignity. Steinbock (1997) and Roberston (1995) shed light on another important viewpoint. They claim that human embryos occupy that space in between fully-fledged persons with rights and interests and insentient beings with no symbolic value. Personhood and sentience are often argued for their moral significance. In both science fiction narratives and in real life, what defines life forms as sentient falls in a grey area lending itself to the numerous debates on the issues of sentience.

**Works Cited**

**Cinematography**


1989.

Bibliography

Nonfiction Reviews

Black and Brown Planets: The Politics of Race in Science Fiction

Jessica E. Birch


Order option(s): Hard | Paper | Kindle

ALTHOUGH science fiction has always had explorations of racialization at its core, mainstream SF fans and scholars often have ignored the very real ways in which histories of colonization and narratives of race shaped—and continue to shape—the genre. The collection of essays Isaiah Lavender draws together in Black and Brown Planets to contest that silence is a follow-up to his 2011 monograph, Race in American Science Fiction, and is, as Lavender notes in the introduction, an attempt to acknowledge the variation in viewpoints and approaches among people of color. The book is an invaluable resource for scholars of SF, race, colonialism/postcolonialism, and literature, although the majority of the essays may be too theoretically dense for any but the most dedicated fan or undergraduate student to wade through.

Two parts comprise the book and thus provide its title; Part One, “Black Planets,” includes five essays on black identity and SF. Part Two, “Brown Planets,” includes six essays that focus on indigenous SF and Latin American SF. Lavender notes in the introduction that African and Asian SF are outside the scope of a collection focused on “the Western obsession with color” (7). This focus makes Malisa Kurtz’s examination of Paolo Bacigalupi’s The Windup Girl, set in Thailand, an inexplicable albeit welcome seventh essay in “Brown Planets.” Part Two ends with a reprint of Edward James’ 1991 essay on “The Race Question in American Science Fiction,” prefaced by James’ reflections on that piece, and the final piece, in “Coda,” is an essay by Robin Anne Reid discussing how people of color have resisted erasure in SF fandom. The last few essays in the book seem out of place, evincing the slightly disjointed nature of the collection.

Most of the essays engage in literary and cultural studies analysis, drawing from a variety of theoretical approaches while locating their analyses within the particular sociohistorical contexts of the works they discuss. The sole exception to this focus is Marleen S. Barr’s paean to science fiction for black children; in a book where the introduction sets the theme of courageously confronting the racism of mainstream SF, Barr’s enthusiasm about SF as an escape for “children [who] do not like to read about race, struggle, and slavery because it is cruel” (90) seems inapt. However, the other essays in “Black Planets” include Lisa Yaszek’s discussion of black technoscientific genius and De Witt Douglas Kilgore’s critique of liberal pluralism in the construction of Benjamin Sisko for Star Trek: Deep Space Nine. The two authors whose work readers would likely expect to appear in this collection, Samuel R. Delany and Octavia Butler, are analyzed by Gerry Canavan and Lavender, but both scholars choose lesser-known stories to examine. These essays are all interesting reads, and present a provocative taste of what can be achieved by reexamining narratives through the lens of race.

The essays in the second section of the book were the biggest draw for me as I began reading; as a scholar whose work focuses on black speculative fiction, I was eager to see what I had been missing in “Brown Planets.” These hopes were fulfilled by Lysa M. Rivera’s examination of Chicano/a cyberpunk and Matthew Goodwin’s discussion of how virtual reality recreates borderlands to make migration virtual; Rivera and Goodwin draw upon postcolonial theory to explore SF’s potential for a kind of oppositional colonization. Although these essays make complex arguments, the authors lay out their theoretical grounding clearly, making these more accessible than some others in the collection; this is particularly true for Rivera, who connects her discussion of Chicano/a cyberpunk to mainstream [white] cyberpunk, which helps to provide an entry point for those familiar with the most widely-discussed cyberpunk texts. As noted above, Kurtz’s analysis of the postcolonial ethnic and racial complications in The Windup Girl is a thoughtful, compellingly written essay on “techno-Orientalism” that illustrates the complexities of ethnicity, nationality, and humanity in Southeast Asia; despite its incompatibility with the rest of the collection, the essay shines.

The incongruence of the essays made the vision
for this book difficult to discern at times; while Lavender’s commitment to diverse viewpoints is commendable and the introduction as it stands brings a personal touch to the importance of race in SF, the book would have benefited from a discussion of how “science fiction” was defined for the purposes of the collection. This is particularly true of the essays on North American indigenous SF; the analyses are excellent in and of themselves, but the connection to science fiction seems tenuous. The question is taken up directly in Patrick B. Sharp’s essay on Silko’s Ceremony, although his argument is more convincing in portraying the novel as an act of resistance to mainstream white SF than in presenting it as SF.

Overall, the collection is one that not only contributes to the scholarly literature of SF but also is of value to ethnic studies and postcolonial studies scholars. Many of the essays would be a struggle for most undergraduate students, but the book would serve well as an accompaniment to a graduate course. Many of the essays would be of significant value to other literature scholars, regardless of whether they have explicit interests in SF, and the book undoubtedly belongs in libraries. One of its most important contributions is simply that it provides incontrovertible proof—if such evidence is still demanded by any SF scholars—of the centrality of race to SF, with a wealth of references to mine for more works by SF writers of color whose positions outside white mainstream society give them different vantage points on the possibilities of the future.

Order option(s): Hard | Kindle

THE PALGRAVE PIVOT IMPRINT aims to publish current research that is longer than a journal article and shorter than a monograph. Pivot’s digital-first format is meant to offer new research promptly produced for academic consumers to download. Body, Soul and Cyberspace in Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema is under one hundred pages long despite all the weighty topics included in its title. The main concern of the book is how human interactions with cyberspace are represented in SF film. The book focuses on a relatively short list of fairly recent movies in its discussion: Aeon Flux (2005), Avatar (2009), eXistenZ (1999), Inception (2010), The Matrix (1999), The Thirteenth Floor (1999), Total Recall (2012 remake), Transcendence (2014), and TRON: Legacy (2010).

The first chapter, “Body — Cyborgs, Clones, and Automata: The Matrix, eXistenZ, Avatar,” considers postmodern embodiment. Magerstädt follows Vincent Miller in arguing that with the decline of religion and the development of new technologies we are more body-focused and more able to adapt and control our bodies. In some cases, as with the genetic manipulation explored in Gattaca (1997), the technologies of SF films have already become real, forcing us to wrestle with their social implications. The second chapter, “Soul — Cyber-Spirituality and Immortality: The Thirteenth Floor, Aeon Flux, Transcendence,” discusses science fiction as a site of religious discourse, drawing on John D. Caputo’s assertion that cyberspace and virtual reality are inherently religious as they require accessing a space beyond or apart from reality. Magerstädt argues that science fiction cinema uses these tropes to valorize a material, organic wisdom over abstract pure knowledge, insisting that human intuition or emotion is a valid way of knowing despite the power of technology. Magerstädt views SF as a series of narratives about transcending mortality, which means becoming other than human. This chapter also considers what moral duty is owed to virtual characters, especially when the unbounded nature of virtual space can be corrupting. Later in the book Magerstädt considers the technological sublime as a substitute for religion.

The third chapter, “Cyberspace — Dreams, Memory and Virtual Worlds: TRON: Legacy, Total Recall (2012), Inception,” is the strongest of the book. Here

---

Body, Soul and Cyberspace in Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema: Virtual Worlds and Ethical Problems

Emily Hegarty

Magerstädt argues that memories, dreams, and cyberspace are all virtual realities. She relies on Gilles Deleuze’s concept of the crystalline image, in which the virtual and the actual are equally real. The chapter offers a wonderful exploration of the relationship between facts and memories, particularly when memories can be implanted or manipulated but function factually for the person remembering. This chapter offers the book’s best discussion of film art in examining the ways that film technology itself blends the actual and virtual by combining CGI and live action film and animation into the same scene. Magerstädt also considers the dreamy experience of viewing a film, still a cherished experience in our culture. Magerstädt argues that the prevalence of the virtual/actual theme in cinema is a reflection of society’s rocky adjustment to the internet and the blending of cyberspace into people’s actual lives.

This brief book has several strengths. Magerstädt is a deft, clear writer. Her readings of the films are especially rich, calling attention to aspects that even avid fans may have overlooked. She is consistently considerate to her audience in explaining briefly and clearly both films and literary theories that her readers may not have encountered. One issue the book does not address, despite its consideration of morality and space, is the question of colonial tropes in these films. There is much discussion of the moral issues of Avatar, and even at one point a comparison of the Na’vi with the Ewoks of the Star Wars universe as visions of natural space, but no consideration of how inhabiting indigenous spaces, cyber- or not, implies the availability of that space for the colonizer. Similarly, most of the technological issues of concern in this book are issues of psychological or spiritual comfort or stability. While these are important, there is no attention to how people are already affected by cybertechnology in sinister ways, such as mass data surveillance or the virtual battles of military drone operators resulting in real deaths, even though this kind of imagery is also prevalent in SF (and mainstream) cinema. Most of all, this book would have been better if it had examined more films. Most of the films mentioned are discussed in more than one chapter. While this strategy gives the book a certain cohesion, more diverse examples would have been welcome.

But it is no bad thing to wish the book were longer. Body, Soul and Cyberspace in Contemporary Science Fiction Cinema is well-written and insightful. There is a bibliography and filmography as well as an index, and each chapter is preceded by an abstract. Anyone working on philosophical issues in the films Magerstädt discusses would do well to read this book, particularly Avatar scholars. The book’s brevity and tight focus on just a few films means it may be too narrow for any but large library collections.

They Live

Kevin Pinkham


Order option(s): Paper | Kindle

IF I WERE to hazard a guess, I would venture that most of us who study science fiction came to our vocation by first being fans. Other than Jane Austen scholars (who, in my experience, can barely contain themselves when they talk about the BBC’s scene with Mr. Darcy and the Pond), few scholars seem as effusive about their subject as do SF scholars. Scholarship, it seems, is a natural progression of fandom. However, most authors of scholarly SF criticism tend to suppress their fannish enthusiasm in favor of presenting a more stylistically staid persona. Along comes the Cultographies Series, of which D. Harlan Wilson’s They Live, critiquing John Carpenter’s cult film, is the latest offering.

The Cultographies Series is published by Wallflower Press, an imprint of Columbia University Press. The series strives to offer an experience similar to that of the British Film Institute’s Film and TV Classics Series. The Cultographies books are slightly smaller than the BFI books, able to fit in a back pocket, presumably for quick referential access. Both series offer exceptional analyses of individual films, including sections on the context, making, and reception of the films. Where the Cultographies books seem to differ is in their focus strictly on cult films and in their “personal introduction,” in which the author offers his or her own personal connection to the film under critical scrutiny, which may provide some insight into the author’s theoretical approach.
In the introduction to *They Live*, Wilson, who grew up in the Eighties in the Midwestern US, shares his fascination with professional wrestling, where Roddy Piper, the star of Carpenter’s film, got his start. Wilson also acknowledges that Carpenter had become one of his favorite directors by the time the film *They Live* came out in 1988. Immediately, the introduction demonstrates the rollicking mix of theoretical parlance and the very personal, even gleeful, fan voice that will permeate the book. Wilson adapts Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the “becoming-animal”—a Kafkaesque process in which an atavistic or even animalistic identity is assumed in a struggle for agency—converting it into the “becoming-Piper,” Wilson’s term for the transformation of Piper’s character Nada into a figure clearly inspired by his wrestling persona in order to resist the mind-controlling aliens of the film: “To become Piper is to become violent, to become sexist and hypermasculine—to become an American hero [...]” (2-3). Wilson continues with an almost confessional discussion of the effect the film had on him: “I envisioned myself in the effigy of Piper trouncing the Russians with arsenals of everything from flying kicks and atomic drops to machine guns and hi-tech cyberware” (5). This kind of direct insertion of authorial perspective and experience is rare in scholarship and can be surprisingly refreshing.

After the personal introduction, Wilson offers the cultural context of the film in his first chapter, “Cult of the Eighties.” His central argument here lies in the motif of excess that runs rampant through the film, taking Reaganism, big hair, masculinity and the body, and blockbusters as his analytical points of departure. We move into the chapter “Wake Up Call,” centered on the sources of the film: Ray Nelson’s short story “Eight O’Clock in the Morning” and the comic book adaptation of that story, titled “Nada,” also written by Nelson and illustrated by Bill Wray. In this chapter, Wilson presents a close reading of artifacts connected to the film, including the trailer, but especially the poster’s eye and sunglasses imagery, which Wilson argues “underscore[s] the threat of perceptual construction that serves as the film’s guiding theme and source of friction” (28). The chapter “Reel Politik” delves into the political themes of class and homelessness that permeate the film and then explores various critical receptions of the film and its largely successful box office numbers.

“Through a Pair of Cheap Sunglasses Darkly” begins Wilson’s close reading of the film itself, exploring its Lovecraftian connections, the way the film wrestles with identity, its connection to the Western, and Carpenter’s use of color and black and white to highlight perceptual construction, sliding into an extended discussion of the film’s sunglasses, “the central cult artifice” (44) of *They Live*. Playing with brief quotations on the media from Baudrillard, Benjamin, and Horkheimer and Adorno, Wilson unpacks a core tenet of the film: seeing through ideology, playing on the multiplicity of meanings in the word “through.” Wilson segues into a psychoanalytic and gender studies reading of the film in the next chapter, “Pathological Unconscious,” paying special attention to the wrestling aesthetic and hypermasculinity of the film’s famous fight scene between Nada and his co-worker Frank Armitage. The chapter “Legacies” wraps up Wilson’s analysis, examining the post-film careers of Roddy Piper and Keith David (who played Armitage), its pop culture resonances, and the rumors of a remake. In closing the book, Wilson offers his final observation: the film deconstructs itself, critiquing American capitalism, the media, and hypermasculinity but becoming complicit in these very issues by being a hypermasculine, money-making, violent, sexist movie. This complicity, however, does not mean the movie is a failure, as Wilson posits in his closing sentence: “...*They Live* has the capacity to stand with the giants of cult cinema and could function as a primer for studies of the form precisely because it succeeds so effectively at failing to be what it wants (and doesn’t want) to be” (98 emphasis Wilson’s).

It seems rare to find books that focus on a single text. Most works of criticism reviewed in the *SFRA Review* are either anthologies of many essays by different authors on a specific topic (e.g. Italian SF), or some author(s)’s monograph on a single topic featuring multiple texts (e.g. werewolves in popular culture). Rarely are we offered the opportunity to experience a single author’s more comprehensive take on a single text, which allows, in this case, readers to engage in a more extended conversation with an excited and informed author. At only ninety-eight pages of analysis (with an additional ten pages of well-researched notes), the book is a quick, highly informative, and engaging read.

Overall, the book strikes me as slightly more theoretical than most of the BFI books I have encountered. *They Live* appears to be not entirely for beginners to
cult studies; Wilson references not only Baudrillard and the Frankfurt School, and Deleuze and Guattari, but also Foucault, Althusser, and Bakhtin, among others. Although it does help to know who those critics are, the text is not overly esoteric. Clear explanations are given when recondite theorists are referenced, but those references tend to be limited to only a few sentences quoted from primary sources when they occur. Often I was under the impression that I was reading an excellent demonstration of how to apply theory to a film, along the lines of the examples provided in generic Introduction to Theory and Criticism textbooks. Thus, the book works as an approachable academic-ish text with much to offer students and scholars who have at least an introductory knowledge of cult and/or literary criticism. The book carves out a niche in cult studies, standing as an example of enthusiastic, informed scholarship. Cult film scholars, especially those working in SF, Horror, or Carpenter’s oeuvre, must seek this book out. The Cultographies Series’ website lists one hundred and eleven cult films of interest, but the series has so far published only twelve books. The editors are seeking proposals, so those interested in more freely blending their fannish and academic aspects should visit the website www.cultographies.com for details.

*Modernism and Science Fiction*

Michelle K. Yost


**Order option(s):** [Hard](#)

JUST AS no two academics will ever agree on a precise definition of science fiction, isolating a singular meaning of Modernism is just as difficult. Is it the scope of ideas or the company you keep? William Somerset Maugham wrote as prolifically and stylistically as any of his Bloomsbury contemporaries, and yet his absence from Virginia Woolf’s parlour seems to have kept him out of many Modernist compendiums. On the other hand, E.M. Forster’s “The Machine Stops” and Joseph Conrad and Ford Maddox Ford’s *The Inheritors* are distinct pieces of science fiction that have not impacted these writers’ unequivocal standing as Modernists. Open the index of a study of Modernism and you almost certainly will not find “science fiction” among the entries, nor do most studies of science fiction contain any entries under “Modernism.” What Paul March-Russell has done is try to help us bridge this academic and genre divide between two subjects whose Venn diagrams would hardly touch in the minds of most.

*Modernism and Science Fiction* is the latest entry in the *Modernism and...* series edited by Roger Griffin, whose goal is “to expand the application of this highly contested term [Modernism] beyond its conventional remit of art and aesthetics” (i). Griffin invites March-Russell to bring science fiction “into the living room of the human sciences, rather than be treated as a form of creativity whose truths are always ‘out there’” (xi). By Griffin’s own admission science fiction resides somewhere down in Lambeth, far from Bloomsbury’s refined culture, and it is March-Russell’s difficult task to shed light on how Modernism and science fiction should occasionally be invited to take tea together.

It is difficult to say who will gain more appreciation from *Modernism and Science Fiction*: the Modernist looking to learn more about science fiction, or the science fictionalist pursuing lessons in Modernism. Though short on pages, March-Russell in four chapters covers a century of science fiction, twice the number of years identified as Modernist. The thematic connections are loose but make for better chapter titles than the actual chronological flow that starts in the nineteenth century and ends with the works of Joanna Russ. Those already well versed in the history and evolution of science fiction will find much of the material already familiar. If anything weighs down March-Russell’s analysis it is the sheer volume of sources he uses and references he makes (there are 625 footnotes, four for every page, rarely citing the same work twice).

March-Russell begins with “Scientific Romance and the Culture of Modernism,” covering a period when two branches of fiction, Modernism and SF, emerged from a rapidly changing world suffused with Darwin, Maxwell, Tyndall, and others. But where many traditional Modernists such as Forster rejected the “scientific romance” (27), early science fiction writers like Wells embraced the possibilities of the future. The
“individual desires of self-transcendence through science and technology” (48) was the focus of much of the science fiction of the 1880s to the interwar years, contrasted with the high Modernist quest for self-transcendence via psychic development. Those Modernists who embraced The Machine, as it were, are not as well remembered and are mostly relegated to popular culture (i.e. the low brow culture of mass readership). This division March-Russell sees echoes Adam Roberts’s opinion in *The History of Science Fiction* (2005), which contains two chapters, “High Modernist Science Fiction” and “The Pulps,” on the bifurcation of Modernism.

Part two, “Utopia in the Time of Apocalypse,” includes multiple subjects under its heading: The Last Man, the degeneration of the body and the social order, the rise of feminism, Russian sf, and mechanized humanity. March-Russell asserts that “Modernist sf [...] is irredeemably ambivalent, anxious that its own utopian desires will become the basis of dystopia” (49); the perfection of human life may be its downfall, a theme seen as far back in Bulwer-Lytton’s Vril-ya. While revisiting themes most sf scholars are familiar with, March-Russell brings in Modernist perspectives, such as Virginia Woolf’s glowing letter to Olaf Stapledon about *Star Maker*, and Wells’s distaste for Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* as being too regressive. It would have been interesting, though, to see more about High Modernism’s reaction to science fiction, which in this era seems to fill Woolf’s idea of the ‘Low Brow.’

“Pulp Modernism: Genre SF” brings us to the age of the pulps and across the pond to American science fiction and the “cult of the engineer” (86). The discussion of Modernism and its relationship with SF becomes less obvious at this point, set aside in favour of an examination of science fiction’s rise in the US and the efforts of Gernsback and other fans to create a unique literary genre. March-Russell admits that “pulp sf has typically been regarded as a separate development from modernist literature” (110), the former appearing to have greater influence in the US, the latter in Europe, and connections between them only loosely made.

The final section, “*New Worlds* and the Many Deaths of Modernism,” brings more recent SF to the forefront of discussion, tracing the lingering Modernist influence long after the era of Modernism had passed, making use of Roger Luckhurst’s essay “The Many Deaths of Science Fiction: A Polemic” (*Science Fiction Studies*, 1994). March-Russell delves into the New Wave of the 1960s and science fiction’s use of high Modernist techniques in the post-atomic world. For March-Russell, the spiritual and social anxiety expressed in the narratives of the Bloomsbury clique emerge in Cold War SF analogies, and his exploration between the two genres finds footing again. What was once Modernist anti-imperialism becomes counter-culturalism; the psychic becomes the psychedelic, the mechanical now cybernetic. Without Modernism, March-Russell is saying, there would have been no New Wave or Cyberpunk science fiction and therefore no sf genre as we know it now.

*Modernism and Science Fiction* is not likely to find itself on the reading list of traditional Modernist literature courses, but it certainly makes a strong case for at least some excerpts to make their way into class discussion. The argument is not one for displacing classical Modernism, but for making room to include other works from the era. In the same vein of thought, science fiction academics might consider including a little more about the Futurians, Joseph Conrad, the Society for Psychical Research and others in the syllabus.
The Collected Stories of Frank Herbert

Bruce A. Beatie


Order option(s): Hard | Paper

TWO THINGS surprised me in the process of reading the 40 stories in this massive collection. First, although I have read the Dune books many times since I first discovered them, and most of Herbert’s other novels at least once, I could not remember having read a single one of the Herbert stories in this collection; surprising especially because I subscribed to Astounding in the 1950s and, since half of the first 14 stories in the collection appeared between 1954 and 1959, I must have read one or two. The second surprise was that so few of the stories seemed to me comparable in quality (and sometimes, seriousness) to the Dune series and Herbert’s other novels: surprising especially because only 11 of the stories have not been reprinted before, mostly in the five earlier collections of his stories. Three of the stories have appeared only in one collection (The Book of Frank Herbert, 1973), five of them have been reprinted twice, and three thrice.

I deliberately read and made notes on all of the stories without consulting any secondary literature on Herbert. A third surprise came when, after making substantial progress on a first draft of this review based solely on my notes, I began looking at what has been written about Herbert’s work. While the Daniel Levack and Mark Willard bibliography is an excellent and comprehensive resource (Dune Master: A Frank Herbert Bibliography, 1988) which provides detailed summaries of all the novels and stories, it lacks critical commentary. Tim O’Reilly’s Frank Herbert, written between the 1976 publication of Children of Dune and God Emperor of Dune in 1981, concentrates mainly on the Dune trilogy; his discussions of the other novels mostly relates them to the trilogy, as do his brief comments on only 14 of the stories (though all but one had been published by the end of 1979). Of the 89 entries for Herbert in the MLA International Bibliography, from the earliest in 1971 to the latest in August 2015 (a dissertation), only three can be identified as “non-Duniverse”, and none are on any of the stories; 16 of the entries are from Science of Dune, a 2007 collection of essays for a more general reader.

It may be useful, therefore, to continue from my first paragraph with more information on the publication of the stories. Such information is available elsewhere, but in much more scattered form. 33 of the 40 stories appeared first in pulp journals. Three appeared first, as noted, in the 1973 Book, two appeared in the Ace paperback periodical Destinies (1979), one appeared in Future City (a solicited collection of SF stories about cities, compiled by Roger Elwood, 1973). “The Daddy Box,” featuring an alien sentience called the ferrosslk, appears for the first time in this Collected Stories; Levack-Willard noted in 1988 that a story called “Accidental Ferrosslk” was “Forthcoming” (142, 143); the Internet Science Fiction Database says it was to appear in Harlan Ellison’s unpublished Last Dangerous Visions. The earliest reprint was the second story, “Operation Syndrome” (originally titled “Nightmare Blues”, in the Harry Harrison-edited 1968 SF: Author’s Choice; it was included again in the 1973 Book. Finally, six of the stories were revised (lengthened significantly: the page counts noted below are from this collection) and published as novels: “Packrat Planet” (19.5 pages, from Astounding in 1954) became Direct Descent (186 pages, Ace, 1980); the four Lewis Orne stories (altogether 95 pages, from Astounding and Fantastic in 1958-59) became The Godmakers (221 pages, Berkley, 1972), and “Greenslaves” (24 pages, from Amazing in 1965), became The Green Brain (160 pages, Ace, 1966). The average length of the 40 stories is 16 pages, the range is from less than a page (the two tiny stories in Destinies) to 53 pages (“The Priests of Psi”), which became the final section of The Godmakers. Dune Master lists (140) four non-SF stories published by Herbert between 1937 and 1947.

Since the limits of a review don’t allow comments on even a significant number of the stories (my cumulative notes on the 40 stories fill over 12 single-spaced pages), I will focus on several of the stories that struck me as especially good or interesting. For
me the best and most moving story is “Try to Remember” (pp. 303-334, in the October 1961 issue of Amazing, and reprinted in the collections The Priests of Psi and Other Stories [Gollancz, 1981] and Eye [Byron Preiss Visual Publications, 1985]). It begins in a way all too typical of SF from the late 30s, and even in Astounding, through the 50s. A ship in the shape of “a hideously magnified paramecium with edges that rippled like a mythological flying carpet” with “five green-skinned, froglike occupants” lands in eastern Oregon and delivers an ultimatum to the world: communicate with us or be destroyed. As evidence of the aliens’ power, “Eniwetok had been cleared off flat as a table at one thousand feet depth … with no trace of an explosion. All Russian and United States artificial satellites had been combed from the skies.” (303) Thousands of linguistic experts congregate nearby. Francine Millar, whose husband had died just before the ship arrived, and her Japanese teammate meet daily with one alien, who speaks to them in an unknown language. She feels they are close to a solution when the U.S. military asks her to take a bomb into the ship. She refuses, but a Russian attack shows the ship has strong defenses. During the attack, the five aliens emerge and tell Francine (in English) that they “are among the eight hundred survivors of a race that once numbered six billion …. This once great race did not realize the importance of unmistakable communication. They entered space in their sick condition—hating, fearing, fighting. ... The eight hundred survivors—to atone for the errors of their race and to earn the right of further survival—developed a new language, ... perhaps the ultimate language,” a language in which “they cannot lie ....” (330) Francine realizes that “We were supposed to remember our own language—the language we knew in childhood, and that was slowly lost to us through the elevation of reason.” (331) With the help of the aliens, she delivers a message to our world, beginning: “All the window widows of all the lonely homes of Earth am I,” she said .... “By the power of mimesis, she projected the figure of a woman in a housedress, leaning on a windowsill, staring hopelessly into an empty future.” and by the power of the aliens’ technology “she projected the figure of a woman in a housedress leaning on a windowsill, staring hopelessly into an empty future. ... And now, she picked up a subtle rhythm of words and movements that made experienced actors cry with envy when they saw the films.” (333) “When you see my proper image—a Candle flickering am I. Then you will feel the lonely intercourse of the stars. Remember! Remember! Remember!” (334) Like many of the 19 stories written before the serial publication of Dune in 1963-64, “Try to Remember” carries reminders of the Cold War. The long central section between the opening situation and the highly personal conclusion is perhaps more detailed that one might like, but Francine herself, as well as her development of the crucial integration of emotion and motion in communication, anticipates the practices of the Bene Gesserit in the last two Dune novels.

“Songs of a Sentient Flute” (pp. 642-684, in Analog, February 1979), another excellent story, has an unusual history. “This story,” Willard writes, “came about through Herbert’s involvement with a 1975 UCLA Extension course on science fiction, a series of evening presentations entitled ‘Ten Tuesdays Down A Rabbit Hole’ created and arranged by Harlan Ellison, and based on an imaginary planet, Medea. ‘At a dinner prior to the seminar, and during the class itself,’ Herbert and others “brainstormed and plotted, with feedback from the audience, the stories that they would write about Medea. ... Frank Herbert set his Medea story into the continuity of the ‘Ship’ series ....” (124) His story “seems to take place before The Jesus Incident in the ‘Ship’ chronology ....” “This story, in Medea: Harlan’s World [eventually published 1985] lacks a short explanatory preface which headed the magazine version. ....” (125) Brian Herbert’s Dreamer of Dune (2003) offers a radically different account in which Herbert, pressed for time, asked his friend Bill Ransom “to write the first draft of the story .... Dad edited the manuscript and typed the final draft ....” (291) Both Willard and Brian Herbert consider the story something of a first version of The Jesus Incident (1979), Frank Herbert’s first novel published as “with Bill Ransom.”

Since this Collected Stories contains no notes other than the “Copyright Acknowledgements” (pp. 699-700), and Herbert’s “Introduction” (pp. 9-17) is reprinted from the 1973 Book, the reader of this version of “Songs of a Sentient Flute” is unlikely to know the tale of its creation; the following comments reflect that reader. Nikki, an 18-year-old poet, has spent his life (presumably born there) on an interstellar sentient Ship which had “systematically filled his mind with all the raw data he could master.” (642-3) During his descent to the well-established colony on Medea, a planet where “swarms of iridescent
airborne [by hydrogen] globes” had “many times” drifted down on the colony, exploded, and caused much destruction, Nikki remembers his mother, “the almond-eyed recorder,” who told him that “Poets are the mules of the mystical world. ... Ship is your father” and “will teach you all you need. And, once you leave Ship, Medea will be your mother.” (642) The Medea Central base is, Nikki thinks, “as though he had never left Ship.” (646) He is teamed with Tamarack Kapule (Nikki notes that her name, like his own heritage, is Polynesian—Deborah Kapule (died 1853) was the last queen of Kaua‘i) and Under Director Tim Root; the three are the last surviving team. Though Nikki has “a sense of contraShip evil in everything Root did” (657), he participates in flights over the ocean in a helium floater; over fields of kelp whose bloom “generates ... gasbags ... at times of intense solar activity.” (638) The gasbags are sentient, and Nikki’s task is to understand their language of color and movement. On their last trip, during which Root deliberately strands their floater over the sea; Nikki forces a landing onto the kelp. He has understood that the gasbags are like planaria, with genetic memory: “The living, thinking creature,” Nikki says, “is really the kelp. The globes are its eyes, its ears, its arms and voice ... its contact with the universe through which it learns.” (679) He and Tam climb out on the surface of the floater, where Nikki sings and dances to the bags, which stimulate the two to make love. Afterward Nikki tells Tam that “[t]he globes say we have made a baby, we truly have ...” (683) The globes push their floater nest back ashore, and they discover that Root has disappeared. “Ship made him,” Nikki had said earlier; “He’s like a partial God who was made that Ship might understand some things better.” (682) (The story is reminiscent not only of “Try to Remember,” but also of “A Meeting with Medusa,” Arthur C. Clarke’s 1971 story of the discovery of sentient floating gasbags on Jupiter.) Its function as a seed story for The Jesus Incident is incontestable, mainly in the parallel between Nikki and Tam in the story/ Kerro and Waela in the novel, but the novel’s narrative is far more complex and less transparent.

A third story that impressed me was “Death of a City” (pp. 614-620, first published in Future City and reprinted in Eye). In an imaginary and unspecified future, Bjska the City Doctor and his intern Mieri have come via ornithopter to judge Mieri’s own unnamed but very beautiful city. Biska was “here on behalf of the species, a representative of all humans together.” (614) If he so judged, the city would disappear, “[t]he natural landscape would be restored and there would remain no visible sign that a city such as this had once stood there.” (615—cf. Peter Jackson’s set for Edoras in The Two Towers) “The species,” Biska argues, “knew the source of its creative energy” in the Second Law (616) which “told humans that absolutes were lethal. They provided no potential, no differences in tension that the species could employ as energy sources.” (617) Finally, Biska decides that “I will begin by relocating the most contented half of the city’s population,” and Mieri responds that she’ll move in with him to “present at least the appearance of being your mistress. They will hate that. ... better they hate us than one another” Bjska concludes: “We will begin with unquestioning love for each other. ... Life requires a point of entry.” (620) For so few pages, its philosophical point is fairly profound; though O’Reilly fails to mention this story, it relates at least to God Emperor of Dune and the final Bene Gesserit novels, published after O’Reilly’s book went to press.

Perhaps the strangest story in the collection is “The Featherbedders” (pp. 510-534; in Analog, August 1967, and reprinted in The Worlds of Frank Herbert, Ace, 1971). I must quote the whole epigraph for the story, since it provides the only possible justification of the title (510, italics original):

“Once there was a Slorin with a one-syllable name who is believed to have said: ‘niche for every one of us and every one of us in his niche.’”

—Folk Saying of the Scattership People

The term “featherbedders,” originally a derogatory name for beneficiaries of labor-union work rules, may imply people who have “niches”—but otherwise nothing in the narrative itself relates to the term. Slorins are shape-shifters who have been driven from their planet in Scatterships. One such ship has been attacked and destroyed near Earth, and a Slorin named Smeg (he proudly calls himself Sumctroxelunsmeg—“a Slorin of seven syllables,” 511) has landed in British Columbia and taken human shape (a “niche,” 513) to search for a lost Slorin named Psilimin from their ship. Driving a used Plymouth, Smeg and his son Rick find Psilimin, his memory gone, having served for “slightly more than five years” (519) as stern sheriff of a small village of the Northwest US. Finally realizing that the towns-
people are the shape-shifted aliens who destroyed their ship, Smeg and Rick flee with Psilimin. As they flee, Smeg’s mind is occupied by a “damn poem” that “just keeps going around .... by a native wit” named Jonathan Swift: “A flea hath smaller fleas that on him prey, and they have smaller still to bite ‘em, and so proceed ad infinitum.” (531) If one thinks of humans, Slorin, and whatever mutant species resided in the village as metaphoric fleas, the quote has perhaps more relevance than the story’s title.

The alien names in “The Featherbedders” lead me to a general comment on many, if not most, of the stories. Many critics have praised Herbert’s use in the Dune series of words and ideas from “ancient” Mediterranean languages and cultures (mostly Arabic, but also Hebrew, Greek and Latin), much as Tolkien used his invented languages and his subsequent invented histories to give a sense of cultural depth—the Atreides go back to classical Greece, for example, and the Tleilaxu preserve an incredibly conservative Islamic culture and belief system. But the alien words and names that Herbert uses in these stories seem, from beginning to end, to derive rather from late-40s SF conventions, where alien names and words seem deliberately esoteric compared to current or historical terrestrial languages—from the Denebian alien Mirsar Wees (“Looking for Something,” 1952) to the alien artifact the ferossik in “The Daddy Box,” 2014. The most astonishing set of names and terms is in “Come to the Party” (pp. 621-614; in Analog, February 1979, with F. M. Busby). Its two alien races are the monstrous Alexii predators and the four-sex Hoojies, both of which have adopted Terran English and Terran proper names. The alien vocabulary of these races includes glorching (what the Alexii do at the Party), protumous (what Alex sits on), squish (a Hoojie gender), warple, gremp oil, weftance, buzzyvines (actually intoxicating), “pandled their pompues” (626), burbles, pizzer, and imposlumed. The names Herbert uses for stars and galaxies, however, though some of them also sound alien, are all real names. Deneb and Vega, in his first two stories, are as nearby stars probably the most frequently used star names in early SF. Gomeisa III (in “A Matter of Traces,” 1958) is a traditional Arabic name for Beta Canis Minoris, while Gienah III (in “Missing Link,” 1959) is an Arabic name for both Gamma Corvi and Epsilon Cygni. Giansar (in “Passage for Piano,” 1973) is a Chinese name for Lambda Draconis.

There are two significant exceptions in this collection to Herbert’s avoidance of references to real languages and cultures. In the complex story “Mindfield,” which appeared in Amazing in 1962, there are Arabic/Islamic references: the first line is “In the kubah room another Priest failed” (335), and one of the two languages of the characters is Arabic. This may be no surprise since Herbert was working on Dune at the time of the story’s publication, and the story’s “Ultimate Conditioning” sounds a lot like Bene Gesserit conditioning. A more explicit example is found in “The Priests of Psi”, the long final story of the 1958-1959 Lewis Orne series which became part of The Godmakers (1972). As Orne descends from his transport to the planet Amel, he remembers “[s]hards of his childhood on Chargon [...] the religious processions on holy days ... the image of Mahmud glowering down from the kiblah ... and the azan ringing out across the great square on the day of Bairam—[indent] ‘Let no blasphemy occur, nor permit a blasphemer to live ...’” (225, italics original). The qibla is the direction that a Muslim must face while praying (most mosques throughout the world have a qibla wall, though such a wall would never have an image of Mohammed “glowering down” from it), and azan is the muezzin’s call to prayer.

These references may suggest that Herbert already had the first three books of the Dune series in mind as early as 1959, but in spite of O’Reilly’s efforts to relate the 14 stories he discusses thematically to Dune, Herbert’s stories make almost no specific references to the trilogy. I noted only three such: in “The Tactful Saboteur” (1964) he mentions “chairdogs” (378); the weak story “The GM Effect” (1965) makes unlikely use of the Bene Gesserit gift; and the City Doctor in “Death of a City” (1973) uses an ornithopter (614) to reach the city he is judging. Indeed, the general lack of references to the “Duniverse” in these stories was yet another surprise for me.

I began this review with my reaction to the failure of most of these stories to match the quality of the Dune books and most of Herbert’s novels. In The Trillion Year Spree (Avon, 1988) Brian W. Aldiss begins a discussion of Herbert by praising his first novel Under Pressure (1955), but adds that “[a] number of fairly standard SF shorts followed ....” (315) However, while he later says that “[t]he basic product of Heinlein, Clarke, Asimov, and Herbert is the SF book, differing very little, at least in appearance from all the short-lived books of any given year” (383), he nonetheless praises the original Dune as “dense and
complex,” repaying “careful attention” and impressing “even on a fourth or fifth rereading.” (316) Unlike Heinlein, Clarke, and Dick for example, all of whom wrote wonderful short stories as well as memorable novels, Herbert is not at his best as a short-form writer. It is good to have all of his published stories available in a single volume, but for readers who know only Herbert’s novels, they are for the most part disappointing.

Il sangue e L’impero

Jana Vizmuller-Zocco


Order option(s): Kindle

THIS VOLUME contains two novels: Sandro Battisti’s L’impero restaurato (9-121), and Francesco Verso’s Bloodbusters (123-297), as well as a short interview with each author edited by Giuseppe Lippi (298-301). Both novels received the Urania Award in Italian Science Fiction for 2014, and the decision to publish them together could not offer a better account of what Italian science fiction is today: the range, themes, scopes, languages, and visions of future are widely different, distinct and thoughtfully enjoyable. While Verso’s characters often enjoy tongue-in-cheek, down-to-earth, palpable technologically-driven human (human/machine) interactions, Battisti’s world belongs to all-powerful aliens, capable of controlling quantum energies and who use this power to achieve their ends. Thus, near human future on one side of the literary continuum looks across to alien shenanigans on the other.

L’impero restaurato (The Restored Empire) is part of a cycle of novels dealing with various themes, but a leading concern is the answer to the question “What could/would an all-powerful, alien being do to/with humans?” Battisti endows the protagonist, Totka_II, Emperor of the Connective Empire (and the most powerful Nephilim) with the ability to capture ‘quantum emanations’ from Earth of any historical period and allow them to be embodied. He is smitten with Byzantium’s power, opulence and military prowess, and looking to found another capital city for his empire, he decides to establish a new Constantinople. Using his ability to control these quantum fluctuations, he observes the court of Justinian and Theodora, a meeting between Justinian and a papal envoy, and the triumphant entry into the city by General Belisarius. The most powerful pull on him, however, turns out to be Theodora. Evil forces gather to attack the positions of Totka’s empire, while the emperor is busy planning the new capital city. After a sudden outbreak from an unexpected quarter, an astonishing (almost a deus-ex-machina) strategy, i.e. the help of Lilith, lets Totka_II and his Empire emerge victorious.

In the interview appearing at the end of the book (301), Sandro Battisti claims that “l’umano non mi ha mai affascinato: è l’inumano la grande frontiera da indagare, così immenso nelle sue potenzialità da sovrapporsi, nel mio pensiero di uomo, all’infinito.” (the human never fascinated me: the great frontier to be investigated is the non-human, so immense in its potentialities that it superimposes itself as infinity, in my thoughts as human [transl. mine]). The novel clearly shows this interest: human beings exist as fluctuating energies of the past, while posthuman entities do the bidding of the Nephilim and are treated worse than slaves. But Theodora is very attractive to Totka; she is near-abused by him, but in her desire to learn about the Connective Emperor’s real identity, she willingly abandons earthly life. However, to imagine, let alone describe in verbal language, an alien world of vast complexity is impossible, and here is where the non-human empire meets its challenges. Battisti is careful not to be too technical, and wisely leaves a lot to the imagination. One could quibble with his mixing, on one hand, the utterly out-of-this world aliens able to travel on quantum fluctuations, with, on the other, their reliance on the words of an augur. Also, the human language in the alien world rears its head now and then, as in the case of the directional metaphor which uses the direction of the hands on the clock (!) (“passeggiando in rigoroso senso antiorario”: walking strictly counter-clockwise). Nevertheless, there is no better illustration of Giambattista Vico’s principle verum factum est (we [humans] can only know what we made) as in the predictability of the fact that empires are created, have to be maintained, and fall - whether they be human or alien. The lovers of empires very different from those depicted by Asimov will cherish this
aspect of Battisti’s Connective Empire.

This novel’s usefulness for teaching can be assigned to specifically two topics. The first one is Battisti’s concern with aliens of a certain type, and therefore with the boundaries of what we humans can imagine aliens are capable of; therefore, the post-human world as envisaged by philosophers may find a solid ground on which to tread here (see, for ex., David Roden, Posthuman Life. Philosophy at the Edge of the Human. New York: Routledge, 2015, in which speculative posthumanism, although focusing on humans becoming non-humans, may help to clear the conditions under which we can imagine beings that are and act very differently from humans). The other thread which can be very useful to open up discussions about one aspect of science fiction is time, and in particular, alternate history. However, the history which Battisti fills with action does not belong to humans, it belongs to the Nephilim, and therefore, rather than human uchronia (i.e. what if a historical, earthly event turned out differently?), the novel presents possibilities of alteration in alien action-time-space, somehow connected to human history.

The basis of Francesco Verso’s Bloodbusters is deceptively simple and at the same time horrifically possible: state taxes are paid not only in money, but also, literally, with blood. The metaphor “taxes are sucking my blood” becomes a reality: each citizen is to contribute to the “coffers” of the Italian state a specific amount of their own blood. There are also banks which have accounts in blood. Of course, tax evaders abound (from the poor man to the politician to the cardinal). BloodBusters is a company that is charged with apprehending these evaders and collecting the amounts of blood they owe: the company’s employees go around armed with syringes, tourniquets, and other paraphernalia needed for this oftentimes bloody activity. (There are also evaders who donate blood to Robin Blood, a charitable organization furnishing blood to hemophiliacs and other patients who do not have their own reserves or are under the state’s radar). The protagonist, Alan Costa, is one of the most experienced BloodBusters, an expert in making “holes” and bringing lots of liquid blood to his employer. A fantastically devilish and corrupt circle of businessmen thrives in the setting most appropriate to withstand such activities: Rome. Costa has a debt to pay to his employer, Emory Szilagyi (nicknamed Emogoblin): a shifty, crafty, weasel-like character who seems to have an impossibly strong hold on everyone. The protagonist discovers troublesome facts about Emory and therefore must decide whether to preserve the status quo or to find another solution. He decides to give his blood as a form of payment to replace the debt of an evader so that she can leave the ‘blood prison’ to be with her son.

However, the novel is not only about blood, splatter, violence, metropolitan chaos and dystopia. It deals with many aspects of politics, and jokes fun at clichés (the Italian North-South divide, woman’s beauty, the expectations of the Church, and many others). Most of all, however, it brings to the fore some cultural questions with which Costa has to deal, and which require some serious thought on the part of the reader: When is it enough to give to a charity? (In the novel, a character is almost bled to death while being charitable.) How can doing good really improve society? What is the spark which ignites an individual’s desire, willingness and need to help others in a society which is run on crass individualism? Interestingly enough, these are questions common to Francesco Verso’s other novels, but observed from different perspectives. Bloodbusters is an excellent example of satirical, tongue-in-cheek “speculative fiction” (the expression with which Margaret Atwood describes some of her works, see, for example, http://www.wired.com/2013/09/geeks-guide-margaret-atwood/). Nevertheless, Verso’s work goes beyond “speculative fiction" because it attempts to bridge the gap between the present and an aspect of near future – a future which he can’t wait to describe, since deep down he is a cautiously optimistic realist. This is precisely where his work may be profitably used in teaching to generate possible solutions to our problems: it has been said that writing dystopias is easy, while writing utopias is boring. Verso’s work contradicts the latter claim, because his writing promotes a critical and entertaining look at the present through the lens of the not-so-beautiful near future, susceptible as it may be to positive outcomes. One way to probe contemporary problems lies in what Verso has repeatedly showed in his novels, and that is the complex role of leadership. Charisma, experience, team dynamics all play a role in how human relations are handled (see for example, Antonio Murturano and Jonathan Gosling, eds., Leadership. The Key Concepts. London, Routledge, 2008). And when technology joins the mixture, it may become an
unwelcome panacea embodied in surveillance-for-profit. Modern theories of leadership (see for example, Michael Harvey and Ronald E. Riggio, eds., *Leadership Studies. The Dialogue of Disciplines*. Edward Elgar, 2011) do not yet include technology in their attempt to explain human governance, even though speculative, socially-engaged fiction like Verso’s offers a solid starting point to be taken advantage of in courses devoted to leadership, business, and power.
Media Reviews

Daredevil and Jessica Jones
– The Future of Superheroic Storytelling?

A.P. Canavan


Order option(s): Netflix

WHEN A NEW superhero TV show or film is announced, the general perception is that it is going to be for a young-adult audience or that it will be specifically aimed at a niche audience of comic-book fans and superhero aficionados. While superhero comics as a genre have encompassed all age ranges and types of story, televisial adaptations have rarely shown the same diversity and breadth of content. With TV shows like Arrow (CW, 2012- ), The Flash (CW, 2014- ) Marvel’s Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.(ABC, 2013- ) and Supergirl (CBS, 2015-) we have clear examples of this. They run the gamut between dark and broody, angst-ridden, action packed, and brightly coloured entertainment, but at heart they have a younger audience in mind and rarely try to be more than entertaining television. But recently Netflix, in association with Marvel Television, announced four mini-series (Daredevil, Jessica Jones, Luke Cage, and Iron Fist), set in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), that would then feed into a fifth mini-series, cross-over show, The Defenders, featuring the main heroes as an ensemble cast. The first two of these shows, Daredevil and Jessica Jones have already aired on the streaming service Netflix, with Luke Cage and Iron Fist announced for release later in 2016.

News of yet more Marvel-based heroes making their way onto the small screen via Netflix could seem like more needless products in an already over-flowing marketplace. However, Daredevil and Jessica Jones are more than just further examples of our appetite for modern-day myth-making and adolescent desire for wish-fulfilment. They are concrete examples of how superhero stories are indeed one of the most flexible forms of storytelling, and are perhaps examples of the future of the superhero genre, and are a valuable part of SF. What sets these shows apart from their colourfully costumed, contemporary brethren is their engagement with a more mature audience, their attempt to tell human stories rooted in a more personal and ramification-filled diegesis, and their use of the frame of the superhero genre to create narratives focused on human drama, rather than on telling another tale of heroes beating up bad guys on a weekly basis or large scale, epic battles. In effect, they are attempting to demonstrate the breadth and width of the superhero genre.

Starting with their similarities, both Jones and Daredevil are 13 episode mini-series following a central character with superpowers. Set in the MCU they occur after the events of Joss Whedon’s The Avengers (2012) and are both set in New York City, specifically the area known as Hell’s Kitchen. They each track their titular character in a slow-building confrontation with a main antagonist and are primarily focused on a street-level view of the world which grounds the shows’ more fantastic elements. These are less shows about superpowers and more about the people who possess them, cementing the fantastic in a relatable story world. In addition to the overarching story concerning their respective nemesis, each show pays a great deal of attention to the human cost of the characters’ heroics and the ramifications their actions have on their personal lives and friends. Much of the shows’ action occurs on the streets of New York and examines the human cost of being a super-powered being in a recognisable, mundane world. Neither of the central characters is a flawless paragon of virtue, nor are they morally certain about their actions and decisions, often realistically questioning whether or not they are doing the right thing.

Jones is a compelling detective noir drama that explores the consequences and effects of sexual and emotional abuse, whereas Daredevil is more of an organised crime drama in the vein of The Sopranos (HBO, 1997-2007) but from the perspective of a frustrated lawyer-turned vigilante by the street level crime and corruption in his local neighbourhood. Rather than focusing on the lucrative teen market already primed for super-heroic tales of epic battles, supremely powerful foes and a decided penchant for wanton destruction and violence, both
shows centre themselves on individual struggles, credible conflicts, and street-level issues. While violence and superpowers feature, the focus is more on mature themes and character-driven action and consequence. So rather than endless fights between the heroes and waves of nameless, disposable minions all rendered in hyper-saturated technicolour, or accented neo-Gothic darkness, punctuated by explosions and over-wrought CGI, there is a direct, and oftentimes uncomfortable focus on the intimate.

The central character of *Daredevil* is Matt Murdock, a defence attorney by day and a masked vigilante by night. Ironically ‘as blind as justice’, his blindness is offset by his other physical senses that have been augmented to exceptional levels. He can hear/see vibrations in a form of echo-location, read ordinary print with his sensitivity of touch, and has an acute sense of smell. He is also a superbly trained martial artist and acrobat. Of note here is the fact that neither super-strength nor invulnerability is numbered amongst his powers. Consequently, Matt gets hurt... a lot. His physical confrontations with street thugs, people traffickers, and mobsters usually result in Matt sustaining considerable damage, both emotional and physical. His literal fight against street crime comes with significant costs, and the brutality of the beatings is left written across his body.

More significantly is the emotional and psychological cost of his one-man war on crime. Matt is depicted as a practicing Catholic and is wracked by guilt over his vigilantism. While many heroes have been depicted in moments of self-doubt, Murdock’s soul searching and earnest attempts to seek counsel are among the most believable depicted, and the show does not descend into the trite messianic narrative so common to science fictional depictions of religion. He doesn’t consult the hologram of a long-dead alien father, nor does he have the earnest advice of a hyper-qualified butler to help, rather he seeks counsel from his local priest in a relatable and believable manner. By including the psychological ramifications of his vigilantism, the show never loses sight of how dehumanising and damaging the violence is, and poses questions for how other SF shows have depicted heroic violence. Unlike many sociopathic-seeming heroes, Matt doesn’t quip or nonchalantly joke as he fights. Instead, he constantly questions the violence he is inflicting.

Living in a run-down, bare apartment and having left an expensive corporate defence firm to start his own more people-focused practice, Matt is a far cry from the rich vigilantes of Oliver Queen and Bruce Wayne. He doesn’t have expensive ‘toys’ or military-grade technology to aid him, and he spends most of the series fighting crime in a long-sleeved t-shirt and a pair of comfortable slacks. So, as a superhero, he seems far more relatable than an uber-powerful or uber-wealthy hero who already stands head and shoulders above the common people. Murdock is one of us.

The first season’s narrative arc pits Matt against the Kingpin. A shadowy crime boss, Wilson Fisk is using organised crime to drive down property prices and raise the capital to purchase large chunks of the neighbourhood. He aims to gentrify Hell’s Kitchen by any means necessary in a story that would fit in many a socialist SF class. Fisk and Murdock are set up as mirrors of each other as they are both criminals who break the law to get their own way, and aren’t afraid of using violence to enforce their will and vision over the area. They are both locals who grew up in Hell’s Kitchen and want it to be better, but while Kingpin is focused on the corporate future with his grand plans of re-development, Daredevil stands for a more conservative, and perhaps nostalgic, approach that fights for the rights of the everyday citizen. This is certainly an interesting dynamic and raises some questions about progress, gentrification, nostalgia, and the status quo.

Like Matt, Jessica is a human hero too. While she possesses superior strength and some small elements of hardness, she is a hard-bitten, cynical, PTSD-stricken alcoholic, running a shady one-woman PI firm out of a dilapidated apartment in New York. Like Matt, she doesn’t exhibit a flamboyant, exclusive lifestyle and struggles to pay her bills by serving subpoenas and working the occasional missing person’s case. Unlike Matt, Jessica is a harder character, shaped by a history of rape and abuse, and she is emotionally withdrawn and jaded. However, it is her very humanity and brokeness that makes her story compelling.

The main season arc focuses on the reappearance of her abuser, Kilgrave. Kilgrave is a master manipulator with the insidious ability to absolutely control people’s minds and actions, making him possibly the most sinister and frightening of any Marvel villain thus far portrayed on screen. While previous villains have had the ability to blow things up and wreak havoc, the invasive and disturbing power wielded...
by Kilgrave is far more intimate and far more devastating and goes to the heart of the debate about violence, rape culture and white privilege. Where other villains may destroy buildings and bodies, Kilgrave destroys the mind, the soul, and the heart of his victims, leaving them scarred, broken, and screaming in his wake. He calls into question their sanity, inspires paranoia, and rips apart their ability to trust anyone ever again. He uses people as disposable puppets, and exhibits no compassion, remorse, or even an iota of guilt about his rape of their minds and their bodies, and his destruction of their lives.

Through the lens of Kilgrave’s superpower of compulsion, Jones investigates and explores the darkest parts of the superhero genre and the human condition as it takes an uncompromising look at the effects of extreme abuse. It also considers sub-plots of an emotionally abusive mother, a drug-abusing neighbour, and a support group for survivors that demonstrates the radically different levels and perspectives of abuse in the modern day. It is through the characters that the horror of the situation, the stakes, and the repercussions of the story find purchase. Their misplaced guilt, their fear, their conflicting impulses of revulsion and desire, and their self-loathing and blame become powerful hooks imbedded in each character that grab hold of the fictive reality and turn their characters into people – people you care about; people you become invested in.

Of the two, it is Jones that should provide the greatest fodder for academic scrutiny. It explicitly examines portrayals of victimhood, sexuality and identity, concepts of femininity and strength, and places Jones in comparison to both Sarah Connor and Ellen Ripley. Jones has been constructed as a truly complex female hero that is ‘othered’ in the masculine world of superheroics, detective noir, and abuse narratives. Her super-strength fits neatly with the female cyborg narrative, while her PTSD-leaden emotions caused by masculine violence draw parallels to Connor’s character in T2. While Kilgrave’s unthinking abuse is a powerful metaphor for white, male privilege and rape culture.

People talk about superhero stories becoming grittier and more realistic, and while Jones and Daredevil do this, they are also mature and nuanced. Matt and Jessica are directly in dialogue with concepts of Otherness and the conflict of individual versus societal justice. These characters are aware that what they do is outside the law and that it is dangerous for themselves and for those around them. This unrelenting focus on the person behind the superhero, and the devastating consequences of wielding their power, gives both Jones and Daredevil a compelling edge over the more action-oriented teen dramas and vengeance sagas. Daredevil’s focus on organised crime and unethical business, and Jones’ unflinching look at everyday physical and emotional abuse is a shocking change from what we have come to expect as standard superhero fare. These shows tackle real issues and modern problems, and make them more accessible and watchable by using the science fictional lens as a filter and providing a story where allegory and symbolism take some of the shocking, debilitating horror away so that we can bear to look at it. They have created compelling drama by never losing focus on the humanity at the centre of the story.

**The Man in the High Castle:**

**Season 1**

Francisco J. López Arias


**Order option(s):** Amazon Prime

TELEVISION HAS NOT resorted very often to an alternate history framework for its shows. Apart from a few episodes scattered throughout the most iconic science fiction serials, and, surprisingly, Fox animated sitcoms, alternate history TV series have been few and far between and, mostly, ill-fated. With the honorable exception of *Sliders* (1995-2000), developing a counterfactual backdrop for a new show, coupled in many cases with appalling writing, led almost always to early cancellation.

However, by now everybody agrees on the fact that the irruption of new digital platforms (Netflix, Amazon Video) for the distribution of films and television series has led to innovation in, among many other things, the process of production and consumption of audiovisual entertainment. Take Amazon Video, for instance. The selection of pilot episodes that can be potentially developed into full seasons, a task...
traditionally assigned exclusively to network executives, has become for them an exercise of democracy by allowing prospective viewers to choose future series based on their number of viewings. On January 15th 2015, Amazon released the candidates for their fourth pilot season. The first episode of The Man in the High Castle became an instant hit, both in terms of audience and critical appreciation. One month later, on February 18th, it had been picked up for nine more episodes, which were released on November 20th. According to Roy Price, the Vice-president of Amazon Studios, it turned into their most watched pilot ever (Lewis, 2015). The first season only took four weeks to earn the honour of being Amazon’s most frequently streamed show ever (Walker, 2015), and a second season has already been commissioned.

Adapting Philip K. Dick’s The Man in the High Castle, which is widely considered to be the paramount work within the genre of alternate history, could not have been an easy task. Dick’s story about the counterfactual partition and occupation of the United States by the Nazi Reich and the Empire of Japan after an Axis victory in World War II features certain postmodernist devices and structures, which typically tend not to translate well from literature to the audiovisual arts. The Man in the High Castle, the novel within the novel, which carries the metafictional dimension of Dick’s work, and Tagomi’s visit to a parallel reality that seems to be ours, are the most obvious elements. The combination of both manages to transmit the postmodernist concept of reality as a simulation and, in the book, the characters realize that they are in fact in a simulation through art, whether formally a novel or a little sculptured jewel, such as the one that allowed Tagomi to cross over to that parallel reality.

Every episode begins by treating the viewer to a truly masterful title sequence. It starts with the sound of a film reel starting to spin in a projector. Then, the sequence takes a page from Game of Thrones and, through a map of the United States, introduces the geopolitical situation of the North American continent in 1962, followed by the display of iconic American monuments and the new technology available. The succession of images is scored with an unnerving, yet mesmerizing rendition of “Edelweiss” by the Swedish singer Jeannete Olsson in her heavy German-like accent. At the end of The Sound of Music, “Edelweiss” served Georg Von Trapp as a song of resistance to say goodbye to Austria before deserting from his assigned command post in the Nazi Kriegsmarine and fleeing to Switzerland, but it now highlights the fictionalized processes of cultural appropriation that becomes a constant feature during the series. The combination of images and sound summarizes the show and provokes in the audience a sense of disturbing familiarity, becoming a textbook example of Darko Suvin’s notion of cognitive estrangement.

It is not a coincidence that the title sequence starts with the sound of a film reel. The pilot episode starts in the same way: we find Joe Blake, the show’s version of Joe Cinnadella, contacting the Resistance while watching a Third Reich propaganda newsreel addressed to American audiences in a theater. The first scene, so crucial in setting the mood for the rest of the show, introduces the spy-laden environment that will take the center stage of the plot: a behind-the-scenes battle among the conquerors and the conquered to gain possession of a series of newsreels. These film productions – all of them labeled as The Grasshopper Lies Heavy – feature several parallel alternate realities. For instance, there is one where the Yalta conference took place, and another where San Francisco is nuked by the Nazis in the ‘60s. Who produces them and to what end is still unknown and it is not clear whether the path of the novel is going to be followed on this issue or not. However, structurally, the film within the film does achieve the same thematic purpose as the novel within the novel. Taking into account that this is still Season One, for now the show has been more concerned with introducing the characters and the workings of their fictional world rather than in delving into the mythology or the implications of the story. Even the most ‘science fictional’ elements in Dick’s story have been held in suspense until the last episode of the season. In line with this, and regarding the points of divergence from the novel, the viewer only knows that sometime during World War II Hitler dropped a nuclear bomb on Washington D.C. At the same time, the newsreels may remind viewers familiar with the novels of Philip K. Dick of the alternate world of Ferris Freemont in VALIS (1981).

Overall, the show deals with, more or less, the same themes as the book, but in a completely different way. The comments on history, historicism, the existence of reality, free will, race, or the nature of deceit, are all there, explored in greater or lesser extent in relation to the novel. However, the format and con-
The contents of *The Grasshopper Lies Heavy* are not the only variance from the source material. Every character, with maybe the exception of Rudolph Wegener, has been modified in one way or another, and now their plots and their personal stories are completely different. New characters have been introduced such as SS-Obergruppenführer John Smith, one of those multifaceted and larger-than-life villains in the spirit of Darth Vader, with the particularity that he is humanized almost from the start. He is a prime example of the outcome of the imposition of Nazi culture and ideology over the occupied United States (the Japanese version of this forced cultural influence is depicted in the book through Robert Childan, a character now relegated to a secondary place). Smith is the counterweight to the Kempeitai’s Chief Inspector Kido, a man who does not hesitate to carry out everything that his job description entails but who is not willing to go one step further than that due to his firm belief in ethics and honour. These two men contrast with Tagomi, the Trade Minister of the Pacific States, who feels ambivalent about his role both in the occupation of the West Coast and in world politics.

The motivation of the three other main characters, Joe Blake, Juliana Crane and Frank Frink, although starting from different points ranging, respectively, from fanaticism, naive willingness, to reluctant vengeance, all lead to the same place: a quest for the recovery of the newsreels and ultimately, I expect, to *The Man in The High Castle*. The dynamics among these three characters do become more complex in the show, on account of the increase of opportunities for their interaction compared to the book, and the fact that the writers had the good sense not to rewrite it into a love triangle, which would probably have hampered the pace of the story and made the show lose its focus.

Other plots from the book, more reflexive and low-key, are relegated to the status of B- or C-story, when not directly cut from the script. Linda Hutcheon has spoken of oscillation, the constant mental comings and goings between the adaptation and the audience’s recollection of the adapted work, in her *A Theory of Adaptation* (p. xv, 2006). In *The Man in The High Castle*, the oscillation is two-dimensional, and both are very pronounced. The first instance is, of course, the direct application of this notion as the inevitable comparison between the material provided by the book and the material pictured in the show, in which Amazon’s production holds its own even though the book is close to being unrecognizable within the script. The second one is a more unorthodox oscillation, which is also one of the paramount features of the alternate history genre: the one between the counterfactual adaptation of history depicted in the TV show and our own history.

That is precisely where the fun resides in alternate history: seeing what could have happened and, fortunately in this case, did not; and trying to find in the story what was the narrow event that prevented history from taking such a dark turn. *The Man in The High Castle* will set the tone for future alternate history television productions, some of them already riding on the tail of its success such as the upcoming adaptations of Stephen King’s *11/22/63* by Hulu, or Len Deighton’s *SS-GB* by the BBC. It has its problems, certainly: some spotty acting here and there or, occasionally, some sub-par CGI. It is far from being perfect, but this first season was certainly fun to watch.

**Works Cited**


**Advantageous**

T. S. Miller


**Order option(s):** Amazon Video

IN MY ESTIMATION, Jennifer Phang’s 2015 film *Advantageous* is one of the most important science fiction films to appear in the last several years, although it may not find the large audience it deserves: to date, the film has been released exclusive-
Advantageous is set in an unidentified megalopolis where anti-technocratic terrorist bombings have become routine and advances in holographic information technology easily facilitate instantaneous personal communication – as well as mass surveillance. Significantly, we only ever see corporations and private individuals conducting such surveillance, rather than governments. The nature of this corporatist future, with government apparently subordinated to capital, clearly signals the film’s cyberpunk influences and ambitions, although this is cyberpunk with a distinctively 21st-century spin. Shortly after the film begins, well-poised professional and single parent Gwen Loh is fired from her job as the public face of the “Center for Advanced Health and Living” at a particularly crucial time in her life: just before her daughter will be entering an expensive prep school, the only gateway to a successful future in an even more depressed economic situation than our own.

While the Center commences a search for a younger representative, Gwen suddenly finds herself forced to navigate a job market she can barely recognize: even employment agencies are now staffed by artificial intelligences, next-generation Siris. This job market seems not to recognize Gwen, having no use at all for an aging Asian woman looking for on-camera work in advertising and PR. A “helpful” artificial intelligence does suggest one possible use that the world might have for her discarded female body: she could probably earn a little extra money donating her eggs, as tremendous demand has relaxed the age restrictions (various stresses have apparently also had an impact on fertility rates in the developed world). After Gwen has exhausted all of her other options, she turns back in desperation to Dave Fisher, her former lover and former superior at the Center. Acting according to the manipulative plan of the corporate board above him, Fisher presents Gwen with a Faustian bargain, although what is up for barter is not her soul but her body. Gwen, Fisher explains, could herself be hired as the fresh new face of the Center, but only by literally obtaining a new face via their latest cosmetic procedure.

The Center has always specialized in unnamed alternatives to “invasive cosmetic surgery,” but Gwen would be volunteering as an experimental test subject for a complete transfer of her consciousness to another body. In order to safeguard her daughter’s vulnerable future in a world that seems increasingly threatening towards women and the non-wealthy, Gwen finally relents and undergoes the procedure. Naturally, a different actress (Freya Adams/Yasmin Kazi) plays Gwen’s new – and younger, whiter – body; Adams is billed in the credits as “Gwen 2.0,” although this designation never appears in the film’s dialogue. There is more to the procedure than the audience or Gwen (2.0) at first can or wants to understand, though revealing the details would involve significantly spoiling the plot. The remainder of the film explores the tremendous consequences of Gwen’s decision for herself, her daughter, and the kind of future they desire for themselves.

If the film’s opening scenes strike some viewers as overly heavy-handed in their depiction of a single woman’s struggle to “have it all” in a society that demands she (impossibly) always works harder and improves herself by becoming more intelligent, more attractive, and a more involved mother, the future it imagines is never implausible, and the stakes of Gwen’s decision are made to seem very real. Advantageous tells the story of a woman making a sacrifice for her daughter, but a kind of intense generational anxiety also manifests itself in several ways throughout this film that focuses so tightly on a mother-daughter relationship. For example, the rapid pace of technological progress – “There is nothing in our generation’s skill pool that can complete” – and the cutthroat, all-or-nothing nature of
the scholastic and social competition among young people depicted in the film bring out the Darwinian undertones suggested in its title. Yet Advantageous is not really interested in the gradual replacement of the human race by Homo superior or a race of intelligent machines: all of that seems to be happening, but only in the background, and there are no battle sequences with robots or violent uprisings led by super-genius youth. Instead, Advantageous is a film about parenthood, precarity, and above all the classic science fiction theme of alienation: alienation from one’s labor, body, past, future, technological tools, family, community, self, human life.

Indeed, Phang brings a scrupulous eye to bear on several different issues and motifs that have appeared throughout the science fiction of the past few decades. Phang takes particular delight in playing with the concept of the male gaze, and often in the exaggerated fashion that only a science fictional canvas permits a filmmaker. The camera lingers on skyscrapers that evoke the shape of a female torso “perfected” by technology, and employs this visual conceit of the robotic fused with the sexualized female body to far better effect than did another 2015 release using a similar device, Ex Machina (and with far more sophisticated gender politics). Of course, all human bodies seem rendered vulnerable in the future that Advantageous imagines – explosions threaten to shatter them, machines threaten to replace or obviate them, and even communication technology threatens to render them insubstantial, invisible, non-bodies – yet the female body becomes particularly exposed to the devastating power of social control and the promises and perils of technology. We learn, for one, that Gwen’s body-swap will result in restricted air intake and impede the flow of oxygen to her brain, in an obvious allusion to the supposed damage that tight-laced Victorian corsets could do to the female bodies they disciplined and shaped in somewhat less dramatic fashion. And the Center’s soul-shattering manipulation of Gwen becomes all the more disturbing when we recall that the original reason Fisher had given for Gwen’s firing was that “a younger demographic would benefit from awareness of our technology”. This can only mean that the Center hopes to market the complete body replacements to younger and younger consumers, and we see that even Gwen’s daughter has been indoctrinated by her school into desiring various cosmetic enhancements.

Gwen also knows that she will have no control over the appearance of her new body; Fisher explains that “marketing has a specific physical type in mind,” and, when her daughter swipes through a gallery of possible new faces, we quickly understand that they are not simply all younger, but – more importantly, one can assume – lighter-skinned. Most of the candidates do have some features associated with African or Asian ethnic groups, and the combination of whiteness and a racial ambiguity in the ultimate choice is telling: the Center wants a face that will appeal to a wide range of women, but also one that assumes and enforces the superiority of white beauty. And where, after all, did the body of “Gwen 2.0” come from? The terse answer we get is “body donor,” leaving a great deal to the imagination. Far from being heavy-handed in all of its explanations and moralizations, Phang and Kim’s script also excels by leaving many things unsaid.

I have learned that Phang is not new entirely new to the science fiction scene, but I hope to see much more work in the genre from her in the future. (Advantageous originated in a 23-minute short film of the same name that aired on PBS a few years ago as an episode of the anthology series FutureStates, and Phang’s directorial debut, the 2008 film Half-Life, also has science fictional dimensions.) With Advantageous she has helped to bring more still sorely needed female voices to science fiction cinema, and has demonstrated once again what the medium can achieve when the emphasis falls on social speculation and psychological reflection rather than big-budget Hollywood action sequences and special effects. Whenever I teach Tiptree’s “The Girl Who Was Plugged In,” I ask my students if they feel the story could almost have been written in the 21st century because of its continuing relevance to our hyperreal reality. Now we can say that we truly have a “Girl Who Was Plugged In” for the contemporary moment, and that is high praise. If, as I mentioned, I was initially struck by the originality of Phang’s voice as a relative newcomer to science fiction, in the end I was pleasantly surprised all the more by the note of hope that the film manages to sound in spite of the incisiveness of its techno-social critiques. We have plenty of science fictional films that extrapolate bleak futures based on existing trends; Advantageous does this too, but also finally maps a possible path forward that our humanity – however increasingly vexed and diffuse – can bear.
From computers, robots, cyborgs and androids to ecological systems, management practices and industry (including the production of goods, agriculture or meat production), to the social and hard sciences, art, language and communication, right through to the systematisation and dissemination of knowledge, the theme of this year’s conference – “Systems and Knowledge” – reaches across a wide range of areas in science fiction scholarship.

As a genre inherently replete with a multitude of systems and ideas of knowledge generation and systematisation, science fiction is ideally suited to scientific, linguistic, cultural, sociological, political or philosophical studies.

We invite submissions on any theme and especially encourage proposals that address the thematic, formal, conceptual or theoretical engagement of sf with the conference theme, “Systems and Knowledge”. We welcome submissions from SFRA members on a range of sf productions and sf media, including those that might not typically be associated with the mode. This includes but is not limited to literature, film and TV, performance and theatre, music, games, art and sculpture, advertising, architecture, popular science and research in the social sciences.

Areas of engagement might include:

- Cybernetic Fiction and Cyberpunk
- Information Systems and Technologies
- Climate Change, Sustainability and Ecology
- Carbon and Energy Systems
- Genetics and Genetic Engineering
- (Cognitive) Mapping, Cartography and Modelling
- World Systems Theory
- Alternative Systems of Knowledge
- Myth and Storytelling
- Indigenous Knowledge
- Society and Politics
- Scientific Paradigms
- Disciplinary Knowledge and the “Two Cultures”
- Trans-, Multi- and Interdisciplinary Knowledge
- Translation
- Publishing, Scholarship, Libraries and Archives

The deadline for proposals is the 31st March 2016. Please send 250-400 word abstracts and a 100 word biography to sfraliv@liv.ac.uk. Panel proposals are welcome, as are suggestions for alternative presentational forms. All presenters must be members of the SFRA.

http://www.sfra.org/ | http://currentresearchinspeculativefiction.blogspot.co.uk/
Call for Papers—Conference

**Title:** First contact - Academic track Eurocon 2016 Barcelona  
**Deadline:** None listed  
**Conference Date:** November 4-6th, 2016 Barcelona  
**Contact:** Sara.Martin@uab.cat

**Topic:** As organizer of the academic track for Eurocon 2016 (Barcelona, November 4, 5 and 6, [http://www.eurocon2016.org/](http://www.eurocon2016.org/)) I am seeking international academics who might be interested in participating in one of the three planned round tables in English.

The round tables will have a maximum of 4 participants each and will deal with the following topics:

- Trans and post-humanism
- Gender and SF (please, note this will focus on both masculinities and femininities)
- Teaching SF in a university context

Please, note that Eurocon cannot cover travel expenses, as all our limited funding is going to the very nice list of guest writers (which you may check at Eurocon’s website).

**Submission:** If interested, please contact me at Sara.Martin@uab.cat.

---

**Title:** Global Fantastika: An Interdisciplinary Conference  
**Deadline:** 1 March 2016  
**Conference Date:** July 4-6, 2016  
**Contact:** fantastikaconference@gmail.com

“Fantastika”, coined by John Clute, is an umbrella term which incorporates the genres of fantasy, science fiction, and horror, but can also include alternative histories, steampunk, young adult fiction, or any other imaginative space. The 3rd annual Fantastika conference will focus on productions of Fantastika globally, as well as considering themes of contact across nations and borders within Fantastika. It is our hope to draw together academics with an interest in Fantastika from an international audience to share and disseminate Fantastika-related research globally.

We welcome abstracts for 20 minute papers on fantastika as they occur in any medium and form. Some suggested topics are:

- the production and development of Fantastika in non-Western or non-English-speaking countries
- Fantastika genres predominant in non-Western/ non-English cultures (e.g. magical realism, contemporary mythologies)
- fictional and real empires
- globalization, industrialization, development and the future
- global networks, mobilities, migrations
- borders, defence of borders, crossing borders and occupations
- (post)colonial texts and readings
- notions of the ‘other’
- ecologies, technologies and biopolitics

**Submission:** Please submit a 300 word abstract to fantastikaconference@gmail.com along with a 50 word bionote by March 1st, 2016.

Visit us at [https://fantastikaconference.wordpress.com](https://fantastikaconference.wordpress.com), like us on Facebook (“Fantastika Conference”), or follow us on twitter (@FantastikaPress) for up-to-date information about the event.

And visit [http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/luminary](http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/luminary) to access the “Visualizing Fantastika” edition of The Luminary, featuring extended papers from the 2014 conference.

---

**Title:** International Vampire Film and Arts Festival  
**Deadline:** 9 March 2016  
**Conference Date:** 26-29 May, 2016  
**Contact:** Rebecca Williams <rebecca.williams@south-wales.ac.uk>

The inaugural International Vampire Film and Arts Festival will take place in Sighisoara in Transylvania, Romania, on May 26th - 29th 2016.

From Stoker to Rice; from Nosferatu to classic Hammer onto Twilight, The Strain and beyond - the vampire genre is the world’s most enduring and influential horror genre straddling film, television, literature, theatre, games and new media. IVFAF brings together vampire media-makers from across the World in one cross-industry event – an exciting four-day programme of film screenings, book launches, readings, theatre, seminars, workshops, tours, net-
working events, a trade fair and parties. The Festival will take place within the walls of the dramatic medieval citadel that was the birthplace to the real Vlad Dracula and will involve industry, artists, fans and academics.

Confirmed speakers include:

- Dr Stacey Abbott (University of Roehampton)
- Professor Richard Hand (University of South Wales)
- Dacre Stoker (Author)

Submission: This call for papers is for scholars interested in presenting their work in the academic symposium that runs alongside the Festival (in association with the University of South Wales). Proposals for single 20-minute papers or pre-constituted panels (of 3 x 20-minute papers) on any aspect of the Vampire are now welcomed from scholars working in (but not limited to) the following areas:

- Literature
- Film & TV Studies
- Gothic Studies
- Media & Cultural studies
- Art
- Fashion
- Audience & Fan Studies
- Theatre Studies
- Music

We are also interested in proposals for academic roundtables or workshops. The deadline for proposals is Wednesday 9th March 2016.

Please submit 250 word abstracts and a short author biography to Dr Rebecca Williams at rebecca.williams@southwales.ac.uk.

Further information and regular updates on the event, including information on the Industry Strand and the VampFest fan Festival can be found at http://ivfaf.com/.

You can follow the Festival on Twitter @VampireFestival or find it on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/vampireartsfestival/?fref=ts.

Title: Dangerous Visions: Science Fiction’s Countercultures (2017 MLA Conference)
Deadline: 10 March 2016
Conference Date: 5-8 January, 2017

Contact: Sean Guyness <guynesse@msu.edu>.

In the introduction to the chapter on “Countercultures” in his edited volume The Oxford Handbook of Science Fiction (2014), Rob Latham asserts that “Science fiction has always had a close relationship with countercultural movements” (383). The alternative worldmaking capacities of SF&F, in other words, has long had resonances in the sub- and countercultural movements of the past few centuries, “especially,” as Latham qualifies and expands, “if the allied genre of the literary utopia [and, we might add, the dystopia] is included within” the orbit of SF.

This session, for the 2017 MLA conference, to be held in Philadelphia, PA, seeks papers that probe Latham’s assertion of SF’s relationship to countercultural movements.

“Dangerous Visions”—which references the 1967 story collection of the same name edited by Harlan Ellison, a cornerstone of the American New Wave of SF—encourages submissions on the place of the New Wave in the American counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. But the panel does not seek to restrict extrapolations of Latham’s assertions, particularly regarding the historical and geographic bounds of the term “countercultural.”

Papers proposed to the panel, then, might address the countercultural forces of the following topics, broadly conceived, or take their own unique direction:

- pulp magazines
- SF and the Literary Left
- the New Wave (American or British)
- cyberpunk
- British Boom
- contemporary/world SF
- postcolonial SF
- (critical) utopias/dystopias
- SF as counterculture
- SF beyond science fiction

Submission: To respond to the session CFP please follow the MLA’s guidelines, available here: https://apps.mla.org/callsforpapers.

The official CFP for “Dangerous Visions: Science Fiction’s Countercultures” on the MLA website is available here: https://apps.mla.org/cfp_detail.8510.

Please send 200-300 words abstracts, as well as
a brief professional bio, to me at guynesse@msu.edu. Or you may use may use the contact page on my website (seanguynes.wordpress.com).

Abstracts and bios are due by March 10, 2016. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

**Title:** Anticipations: H. G. Wells, Science Fiction and Radical Visions  
**Deadline:** 15 April 2016  
**Conference Date:** July 8-10, 2016  
H. G. Wells Conference Centre, Woking, UK  
**Contact:** anticipations2016@gmail.com  
Organised by the H. G. Wells Society

**Topic:** H. G. Wells was a novelist, social commentator and utopianist, and is regarded as one of the fathers of science fiction. His early scientific romances featured time travel, mad scientists, alien invasion, space travel, invisibility, utopia, future war and histories of the future: his mappings of the shape of things to come was an overture to over a century of science fiction.

We wish to mark the 150th and 70th anniversaries of Wells's birth and death respectively by exploring his science fiction, his precursors and successors and his lasting influence upon the genre in print, on film, on television, on radio, online and elsewhere. This is especially appropriate because the event will be held at the H. G. Wells Conference centre in Woking, the town where Wells wrote The War of the Worlds. Many of his ideas on politics, science, sociology and the direction in which he feared humanity was going were contained in his early science fiction and ran through his later influential work.

Topics might include, but are not limited to:

- specific individual or groups of novels/stories;  
- the connections between Wells’s fiction and non-fiction, including his political, utopian and scientific writings;  
- utopia/dystopia;  
- histories of the future;  
- precursors to Wells’s sf;  
- sf writers influenced by Wells;  
- sequels by other hands;  
- adaptations into other media.

**Submission:** Please send a brief biography and an abstract of 400 words for a twenty minute paper by 15 April 2016 to anticipations2016@gmail.com. Further details will be available from http://anticipations2016.wordpress.com.

**Title:** Ideal Society and Future Design: The First International Conference of Utopian and Science Fiction Studies  
**Deadline:** 30 April 2016  
**Conference Date:** December 2-5, 2016  
Academic Conference Hall, School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University  
**Contact:** utopia-sf-china@bnu.edu.cn

From the enduring discussion of ideal polis in the Western tradition to Marx's pursuit of communism, from the ideals of Small Country, Few People, of Great Unity, and of Peach Blossom Spring in classical Chinese thought to the construction of modern techno-topias in today's sci-fi literature and movies, utopia has remained an important part of worldwide literature and culture. 2016 is the 500th year anniversary of the publication of Sir Thomas More's Utopia. In light of this, memorial conferences and gatherings all over the world are sure to give a new burst of energy to researches concerning utopian ideas, literature, and culture.

In the spirit of the 500th anniversary of Utopia, Beijing Normal University, in assistance with the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences of Chongqing University, will be hosting a large inter-disciplinary international academic conference on utopia and science fiction. This conference will take a thorough look back at the history of utopian literature and culture, focusing on science fiction literature and on the multiple roads to the future that Chinese culture may take, bringing together scholars in these fields from China and abroad, and promoting relevant researches in China.

The conference will focus on but will not be limited to the 500th year anniversary of Utopia. Several smaller topics related to the main topic “ideal society and future design” will be covered, including:

- Utopia and More.  
- The history of utopian thought and political philosophy.  
- Modern utopian thought and experimental communities.  
- Comparative studies of Chinese and Western
utopian literature.

- The past, present, and future of science fiction literature and art.
- Imagination, fantasy, and literary creation.
- Environment, social transformation, and the development of creativity.
- Posthuman culture, development of A.I., and surmounting the limits of technology.

**Submission:** Those interested in attending need to submit abstracts before the day of April 30th, 2016. After a review by the organizing committee, the invitees shall be notified by June 30th.

Confirmed attendees need to submit papers before the day of October 31st, 2016.

The conference will be held in both Chinese and English: attendees must prepare papers in either of the aforementioned two languages.

Abstracts and full papers must be sent to the committee’s email address in word format.

**Attendance Fees:** Non-students: 800RMB per person; Students: 200RMB per person.

**Contact information:** The Organizing Committee of the First International Conference of Utopian and Science Fiction Studies, School of Chinese Language and Literature, Beijing Normal University, No. 19, Xinjiekwai Street, Haidian District, Beijing, China 100875. Phone: +86-10-58802053; Fax: +86-10-58805592; Email: utopia-sf-china@bnu.edu.cn.

---

**Call for Papers—Articles**

**Title:** Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities  
**Manuscript Deadline:** 1 March 2016  
**Contact:** Register on website: https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/mh.

The BMJ Group journal *Medical Humanities* will be publishing a special issue: ‘Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities’.

We invite papers of broad interest to an international readership of medical humanities scholars and practising clinicians on the topic ‘Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities’.

Science fiction is a fertile ground for the imagining of biomedical advances. Technologies such as cloning, prosthetics, and rejuvenation are frequently encountered in science-fiction stories. Science fiction also offers alternative ideals of health and wellbeing, and imagines new forms of disease and suffering. The special issue seeks papers that explore issues of health, illness, and medicine in science-fiction narratives within a variety of media (written word, graphic novel, theatre, dance, film and television, etc.).

We are also particularly interested in articles that explore the biomedical ‘technoscientific imaginary’: the culturally-embedded imagining of futures enabled by technoscientific innovation. We especially welcome papers that explore science-fiction tropes, motifs, and narratives within medical and health-related discourses, practices, and institutions. The question – how does the biomedical technoscientific imaginary permeate the everyday and expert worlds of modern medicine and healthcare? – may be a useful prompt for potential authors.

Subject areas might include but are not limited to:

- clinicians as science-fiction writers
- representations of medicine, health, disability, and illness in science-fiction literature, cinema, and other media
- the use and misuse of science fiction in public engagement with biomedical science and technology
- utopian narratives of miraculous biomedical progress (and their counter-narratives)
- socio-political critique in medical science fiction (via cognitive estrangement, critical utopias, etc.)
- science fiction as stimulus to biomedical research and technology (e.g. science-fiction prototyping)
- science-fiction tropes, motifs and narratives in medical publicity, research announcements, promotional material, etc.
- the visual and material aesthetic of science fiction in medicine and healthcare settings

Up to 10 articles will be published in Medical Humanities in 2016.

All articles will be blind peer-reviewed according to the journal’s editorial policies. Final publication decisions will rest with the Editor-in-Chief, Professor Deborah Bowman.

Please submit your article no later than 1 March 2016

Articles for Medical Humanities should be a maximum of 5,000 words, and submitted via the journal’s website <http://mh.bmj.com/>. Please choose the
special issue ‘Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities’ during the submission process.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of your submission, including possible topics, or the possibility of presenting your work under the auspices of the Wellcome Trust funded project ‘Science Fiction and the Medical Humanities’, please contact the Guest Editor in the first instance: Dr Gavin Miller (gavin.miller@glasgow.ac.uk).

Title: Science, Society and Civilisation
HARTS & Minds

Manuscript Deadline: 31 March 2016
Contact: See guidelines on website: http://www.harts-minds.co.uk/.

This call for papers invites submissions from postgraduates, early career researchers and independent researchers on the subject of Science, Society and Civilisation for the eighth edition of HARTS & Minds, an online journal for researchers of the Humanities and Arts, which is due to be published in 2016.

The year is 2016. Three hundred and fifty years ago, in 1666, Isaac Newton formulated the Law of Universal Gravitation; two hundred and fifty years later, the publication of Einstein’s Theory of General Relativity would once again revolutionise the field of physics. In that same year, 1916, during the advent of mechanised warfare on the fields of the Somme, the first successful use of cooled, stored blood in a transfusion was completed. A mere eighty years later, in 1996, the first successful clone of an adult mammal was created, just ten years after the catastrophic Chernobyl disaster. Scientifically speaking, such coincidences are not unusual. Nevertheless, rarely have the consequences of Homo sapiens’ predilection for knowledge been thrown into such sharp relief.

It is not just the inventions and ideas alone which are significant, however; the social and cultural reactions to scientific and technological advances are as important as the advances themselves because they tell us as much about the human condition as they do their subject.

In this bumper issue of HARTS & Minds, we invite innovative submissions that consider how the relationship between science and society is represented, explored, and interrelated within a wide variety of cultural and historical discourses. Interdisciplinary approaches are encouraged. Pieces may take, as a point of departure, any of the following topics, as they are explored in the arts and humanities:

- Medical Humanities – its purview and function
- Biological or psychological discoveries, and mankind’s changing perception of itself
- Science or technology in performance or conceptual art
- Global warming/climate change, renewable energy, and resource depletion
- Automation, and its social or political consequences
- Modern scientific education and/or educational science
- Evidence-based policy in government
- The explicatory or obfuscatory aspects of fictionalised science
- Media depictions of, and relationships with, scientific discourse
- Gender and minority roles in the scientific community
- The implications of translation technology for the study of modern languages
- The artistic applications of new developments in cinematic technology
- The history of science and/or scientific approaches to history
- The ongoing relationship between science and philosophy
- The history of philosophy – rationalism, phenomenology, epistemology, ontology
- Recent pharmaceutical discoveries and/or recent drug liberalisation policies
- Normalisation of social networking, and questions regarding data security, digital rights, anonymity

Submission: Submissions should adhere to the guidelines and use the article template available at the cfp website.

We accept submissions of:

- ARTICLES: Send us an abstract (300 words) and your draft article (no longer than 6,000 words).
- BOOK REVIEWS: Around 1,000 words on an academic text that deals with the theme in some respect. This would preferably be interdisciplinary, but we will accept reviews of subject specific
texts.

- **EXHIBITION REVIEWS:** Around 1,000 words on any event along the lines of an art exhibition, museum collection, academic event or conference review that deals with the theme in some respect.

- **CREATIVE WRITING PIECES:** e.g. original poetry (up to 3 short or 1 long) short stories or creative essays of up to 4,000 words related to the theme.

All submissions should be sent to editors@harts-minds.co.uk by 31st March 2016 for Articles and 31st July 2016 for Creative Writing and Reviews.

Please keep in mind that HARTS & Minds is intended as a truly inter-disciplinary journal, and esoteric topics will therefore need to be written with a general academic readership in mind.

**Title:** Museum of Science Fiction Call for Submissions for New Triannual Journal of Science Fiction

**Manuscript Deadline:** Ongoing

**Contact:** Register on website: [http://publish.lib.umd.edu/scifi/about/submissions#authorGuidelines](http://publish.lib.umd.edu/scifi/about/submissions#authorGuidelines).

The Museum of Science Fiction, the world’s first comprehensive science fiction museum, will publish an academic journal of science fiction using the University of Maryland’s journal management system. The first issue of the Museum’s new *Journal of Science Fiction* will be launched in January of 2016 and will serve as a forum for scientists and academics from around the world to discuss science fiction, including recent trends in the genre, its influence on the modern world, and its prognostications of the future.

Greg Bear, member of Museum of Science Fiction’s Board of Advisors and Hugo award-winning science fiction author said, “Science fiction as literature has real staying power and has been a huge influence on our modern world. It’s only fitting that we attempt to understand the cultural and mythic roots of our need for anticipation, adventure, and imagination.”

“We want readers everywhere to consider the science fiction genre they love from new angles. We want them to ask questions and to have fun doing so,” said Monica Louzon, managing editor of the Museum’s new *Journal of Science Fiction*. “We’re encouraging anyone who considers themselves a science fiction scholar to send us their original articles, essays or book reviews for our first issue.”

The *Journal of Science Fiction* will be published online and freely accessible to everyone -- no subscription or submission fees are required. The Museum’s *Journal of Science Fiction* welcomes original work from writers around the world, with an emphasis on the interdisciplinary and innovative aspects of science fiction. Issues will be published three times a year and each will feature between eight and twelve peer-reviewed academic articles as well as several book reviews and essays.

Submission information for the *Journal of Science Fiction* can be found on the Journal’s homepage at the University of Maryland: [http://publish.lib.umd.edu/scifi/index](http://publish.lib.umd.edu/scifi/index).

Submissions for the *Journal of Science Fiction* can be sent to: [http://publish.lib.umd.edu/scifi/about/submissions#authorGuidelines](http://publish.lib.umd.edu/scifi/about/submissions#authorGuidelines).

Any Journal-related questions can emailed to Monica Louzon, Managing Editor: [journal@museumofsciencefiction.org](mailto:journal@museumofsciencefiction.org).

More information about other activities are available on the Museum’s website: [www.museumofsciencefiction.org](http://www.museumofsciencefiction.org).

**About the Museum of Science Fiction**

The nonprofit Museum of Science Fiction will be the world’s first comprehensive science fiction museum, covering the history of the genre across the arts and providing a narrative on its relationship to the real world. The Museum will show how science fiction continually inspires individuals, influences cultures, and impacts societies. Also serving as an educational catalyst to expand interest in the science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) areas. The Museum uses tools such as mobile applications and wifi-enabled display objects to educate and entertain. For a full press packet on the Museum of Science Fiction’s vision and other information, please visit: [www.museumofsciencefiction.org/presspacket](http://www.museumofsciencefiction.org/presspacket).
SFRA Standard Membership Benefits

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

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

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

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

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

SFRA Optional Membership Benefits

**Foundation**
(Discounted subscription rates for members)
Three issues per year. British scholarly journal, with critical, historical, and bibliographical articles, reviews, and letters. Add to dues: $36 (seamail); $43 (airmail).

**Science Fiction Film and Television**
Three issues per year. Critical works and reviews. Add to dues: $59 (e-issue only); $73 (airmail).

**Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts**
Four issues per year. Scholarly journal, with critical and bibliographical articles and reviews. Add to dues: $40/1 year (US); $50/1 year (international); $100/3 years.

**Femspec**
Critical and creative works. Add to dues: $50 (US); $95 (US institutional); $60 (international); $105 (international institutional).