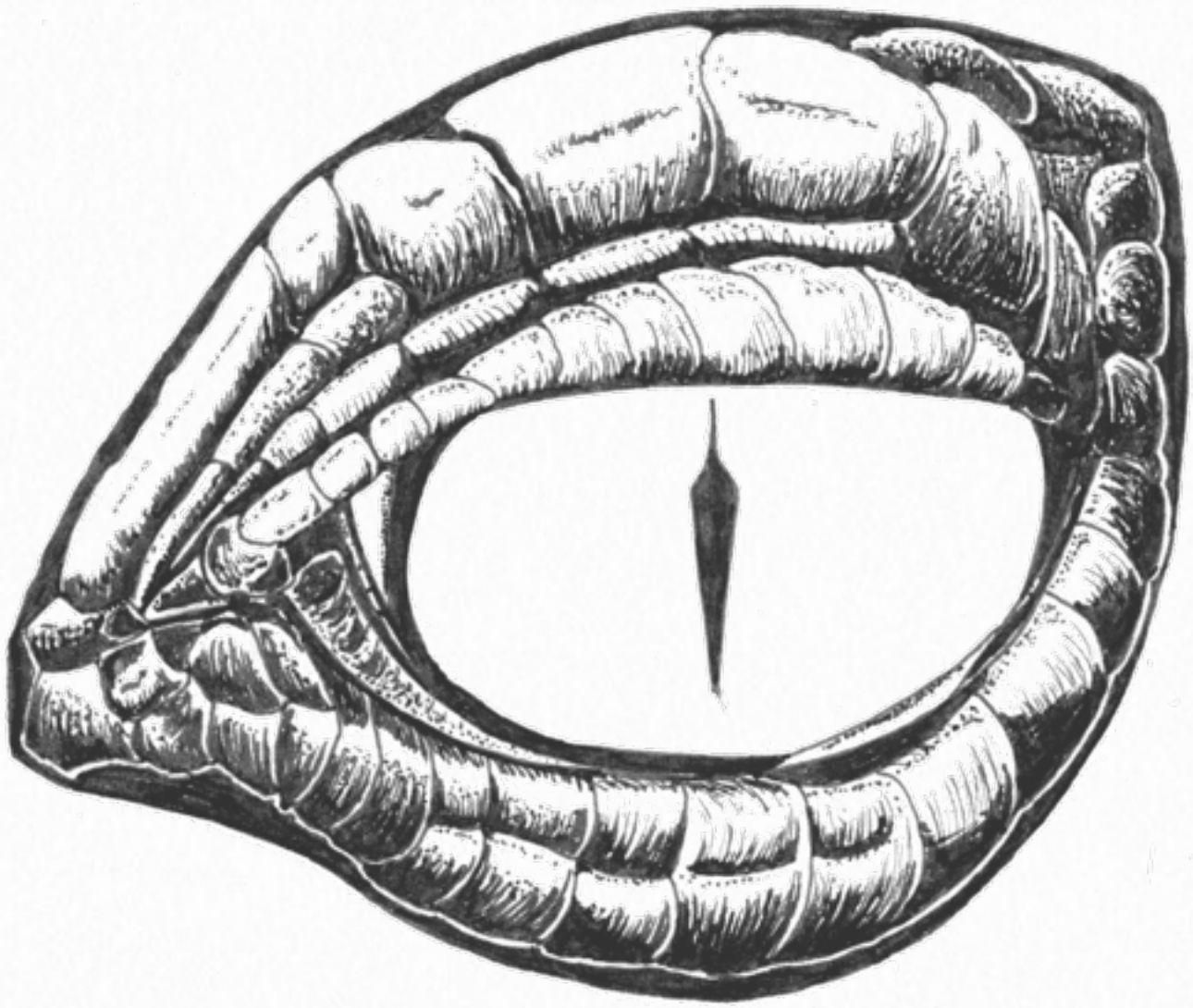
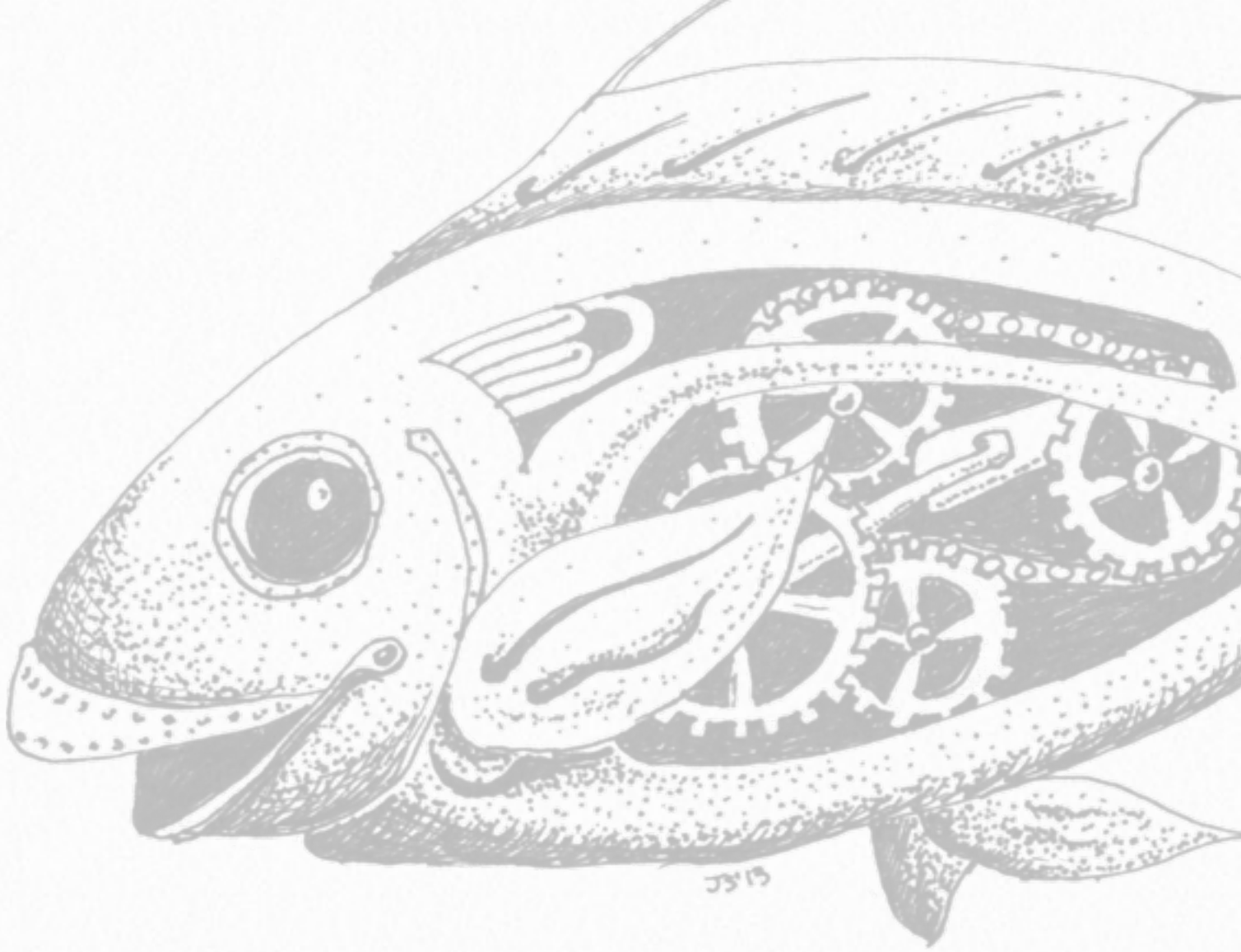
No. 5 / April 2015

Ecdysis



About



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Back issues are available for free download at mcwetboy.net/ecdysis.

Jonathan Crowe (*editor*) now reviews books for ***AE: The Canadian Science Fiction Review***.

Jennifer Hurd, a doctoral student in English literature at Oxford, appeared on ***Canada's Smartest Person*** last year.

Simon McNeil's first novel, ***The Black Trillium***, will be published by Brain Lag on June 24.

Jennifer Seely (*art*) successfully finished cancer treatment in November and is now back in the classroom.

Tamara Vardomskaya's first two short stories have been published. See page 18 for details.

EDITORIAL

Breaking (Down) the Hugo Nominations

LATE DOESN'T *BEGIN* TO DESCRIBE this issue of *Ecdysis*: I'd originally hoped to have it out at the end of December. But life got in the way, as it often does; and here we are.

One of the problems with being this late is having to rewrite this editorial. Timely has a limited shelf life. Last fall I planned to write a piece on writers' bad behaviour in the sf community, and why we really ought not to be surprised by it; with the passage of time that topic seems less pressing than it once was, and my plans only survive in the form of a couple of satirical items found later in this issue.

Then I wrote something in response to the news of Borderlands Books' imminent closure. I argued that the sf field expected a lot from its members: that we should expect to work for very little (minimum wage bookstore jobs, internships, unpaid slush readers, small advances) while being hit up for money above and beyond paying for books and subscriptions. But then Borderlands Books had the bad manners to save itself, which required me to rewrite the piece from the ground up.

But I left it too late. Now, as I write this, it's Easter weekend, and the Hugo nominations have just come out, so *fine*, let's talk about the Hugo nominations.

To be honest I'm less interested in fulminating against the machinations of the Sad Puppies/Rabid Puppies slate—I could, but so many people are doing it already that one extra denunciation is hardly necessary—than I am in understanding *how* it happened.

I think several structural factors have contributed to the current mess.

First, as I've argued before, is the outsized importance that the sf field places on awards. The extent to which we obsess about them is unhealthy: we don't talk about whether a work is good or important, only whether it should win an award. We've vested these overgrown bowling trophies with awesome power. They are to us what the Silmarils are to Morgoth: we covet them with a greedy lust.

This encourages the less well housetrained to engage in antisocial behaviour.

Second, as Nick Mamatas points out, is the shift in the sf community's social norms. Overt campaigning for awards was once a serious taboo; it existed only in the shadows, which minimized the impact of a little logrolling. Once the genie is out of the bottle, it's very hard to put it back in; the difference between tweeting one's own eligibility, recommending good work by friends and colleagues, and setting up a full slate to nominate is one of *degree*, not *kind*; this is simply industrializing an existing process.

Third is the overwhelming size of the field. It's been decades since anyone could keep up with everything; only the rare, best-

selling cases are read by anything more than a minority. The fear of being ignored in so vast a field is the engine behind so much of the promotion, self or otherwise. It's also behind the desperation to win awards: it's so hard to stand out otherwise.

But it also discourages what might be called *organic* (non-politicized, non-promoted, non-slate) nominations: there's so much to read that even avid readers may feel unqualified to nominate. It's also much harder to read work during its year of eligibility: you can't nominate for 2014 when you were just getting to stuff from 2012 that year.

And fourth, the overwhelming size of the field leads to diffuse voting patterns: when there's a lot of good stuff to vote for, a lot of good stuff gets only a few votes. This is the reason why the five percent rule exists for Hugo nominations: there's a real risk that votes can be spread too thinly. Just look at last year's nomination statistics to see what I mean: even 10 votes could mean a top-15 finish.

This makes the final ballot easy to game with surprisingly few people. Even with a couple of thousand people submitting nominations, the scatter-plot nature of organic nominations means that they can be overwhelmed by a tiny, organized minority.

This is what appears to have happened.

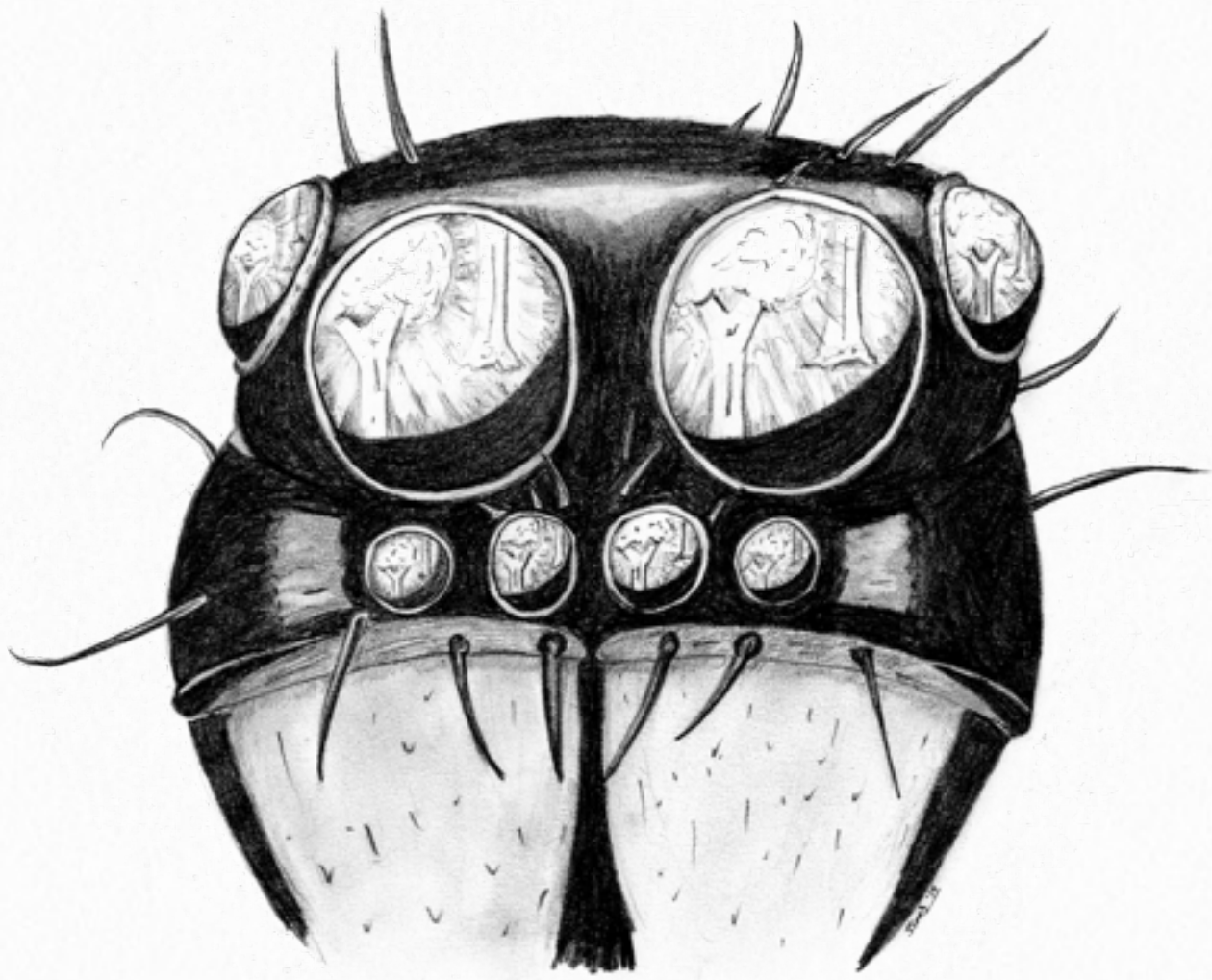
How tiny a minority the Puppies are is something we won't know for sure until after the Hugo Awards ceremony, when we get to see all the stats. But I think I can make some educated guesses as to their strength.

They completely swept six Hugo categories: Novella, Novelette, Short Story, Editor Short Form, Editor Long Form, and Related Work—and they might have swept Fan Writer too, if Matthew Surridge hadn't declined his nomination. On the other hand, they weren't able to sweep Best Novel, and in several categories one non-Puppy nominee—Wesley Chu in the Campbell-Not-a-Hugo, Julie Dillon in Pro Artist and *Journey Planet* in Fanzine—got through. I estimate that the number of Puppy votes required to accomplish this is between 60 and 200: fewer, and they wouldn't have swept so many categories; more, and they would also have shut out *The Goblin Emperor* and *Ancillary Sword*.

The presence of so many nominees from Vox Day's Rabid Puppies slate also suggests that there was no significant difference between the the Sad and the Rabid Puppies. Either Sad Puppies voted the Rabid slate, or there were very few Sad Puppies that were not also Rabid, or the Sad Puppies were greatly outnumbered by the Rabid. Otherwise, we'd have seen somebody else on the Novella, Novelette and Editor ballots. Brad Torgersen's claim that Vox Day was not involved is not only disingenuous, it's irrelevant.

A lot has already been said about what to do about this debacle—voting No Award against the slate in the short term, making the nomination rules harder to game in the long term. But understanding the scope of the problem is the first step toward fixing it.

—Jonathan Crowe



In Defence of *The Silmarillion*

I'm used to being the only one in a given conversation who has read the posthumously-published prequel to J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*—and I'm also used to hearing about its flaws from people who loved either *The Hobbit* or *The Lord of the Rings*, started *The Silmarillion*, and then gave up partway through because they couldn't take it, it was too difficult, there were too many names that started with the letters "Fin," and it just didn't read like a novel.

I typically manage to ignore these complaints, because for me, *The Silmarillion* is only difficult in the way that *King Lear* or *The Iliad* is difficult. Yes, unless you have a pretty stellar vocabulary and solid reading skills, both Shakespeare and Homer are complicated. They're still classics, and the fact that we have to work a little harder to appreciate them doesn't detract from that. And the complaints were ones that I couldn't really relate to—when I first read *The Silmarillion*,

I was thirteen and on a quest to read everything that J. R. R. Tolkien ever wrote, and I devoured the book just as I devoured the History of Middle-Earth series, all of Tolkien's academic essays on obscure philological topics, and his translations of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, and *Sir Orfeo*.

But within the last few months, I've heard similar complaints about *The Silmarillion* from the most unlikely sources. Independently, two good friends—avid fantasy fans, voracious readers, well-used to enjoying complicated texts à la the Malazan series, one of them has a degree in English and history and is as much of a *Lord of the Rings* nut as I am—have expressed similar opinions. They couldn't get through it. Or they did manage it once but it was boring. It was just so different from *The Lord of the Rings*.

So today I'm going to attempt to explain why *The Silmarillion* matters—why it is the heart of Tolkien's mythology, why it's impossible to understand the rest of Tolkien's work without it, and why I think it is one of the most moving and tragically beautiful stories ever written.

(And, yes, why if you set me on a desert island and told me I could only have one book, I've always said that I wouldn't take *The Lord of the Rings*—I'd take *The Silmarillion*.)

¶

I'D LIKE TO START by going back to the very beginning of Tolkien's mythology. Although *The Hobbit* was published in 1937, Tolkien's work on what would become *The Silmarillion* started much earlier. The four "Great Tales"—the stories of Beren and Lúthien, of Túrin Turambar, of the Fall of Gondolin, and of Eärendil—were first written in 1917, while Tolkien was recovering from trench fever. Together with some additional framing material composed around the same time, "it is not too much to say that the outline of *The Silmarillion* was visible by the end of 1917—or would have been if it had found any readers."[1]

These stories grew out of Tolkien's love of invented languages. Most fantasy authors today start with a story and some characters, and then realize that they'd like a cool language to go with it, so they cobble a few words of something together and call it a language. Tolkien's stories, on the other hand, were created because he had already started by inventing the languages, and then wanted to write about the sort of peoples who might speak them.

Sixty years (1917–1977) elapsed between the earliest versions of Tolkien's mythology, and the version that we have today. The stories that make up *The Silmarillion* were, however, the closest to Tolkien's heart, and certainly of all his fiction the closest relatives to his academic work. The fact that there was a sixty-year delay in publishing them was not for lack of effort.

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[1] Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-Earth*, revised edition (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2003), p. 224.

"But to read The Lord of the Rings *without* The Silmarillion *is to miss much of the depth and power and sheer complexity of* The Lord of the Rings *itself. There's a great deal that happens in* The Lord of the Rings *that only fits together because of the legends behind it—the legends that make up* The Silmarillion*."*

(When publishers clamoured for a sequel to *The Hobbit*—which originally had very little relation to the earlier legends, but was drawn into them gradually—Tolkien sent them the poetic version of the romance of Beren and Lúthien, and the prose text of *The Silmarillion*. Through a complicated mix-up at the publishing house, only the former was ever actually read, and Tolkien was returned a polite letter asking him if he would, please, start work on a sequel to *The Hobbit*. When he finally finished *The Lord of the Rings*, he initially insisted that anyone wanting to publish it had to commit to publishing *The Silmarillion* as well, with it. Several stalling and/or skeptical publishers later, he eventually relented and let them publish *The Lord of the Rings* on its own.)

But to read *The Lord of the Rings* without *The Silmarillion* is to miss much of the depth and power and sheer complexity of *The Lord of the Rings* itself. There's a great deal that happens in *The Lord of the Rings* that only fits together because of the legends behind it—the legends that make up *The Silmarillion*. In fact, although *The Lord of the Rings* is usually read as a stand-alone work, it is the one place where Tolkien brings together and resolves all the strands of narrative and story that have played out over the last seven thousand years of Middle-earth's history.

Case in point: Galadriel.

Tolkien's elves are not perfect, pristine, all-powerful, all-knowing creatures, no matter how they may seem on screen—in fact, they're very flawed and very complicated. The angelic Galadriel of Peter Jackson's films was actually a fiery warrior princess—given the name Nerwen, "man-maiden," essentially because of her strength and her stubbornness—who wanted her own kingdom to rule, was a leader in the elven rebellion against the Valar, saw her uncle, four brothers, three cousins, and all their children slaughtered fighting a hopeless war, and proudly scorned the Valar's offer of pardon to the exiled elves at the end of the First Age. Why is that scene in Lothlórien when Frodo offers her the Ring so crucial? Because she is tempted, because the Ring represents the power that she has always dreamed of, the power that she once would have taken for herself without hesitation: "my heart has greatly desired to ask what you offer," she says. "For many long years I had pondered what I might do, should the Great Ring come into my hands, and behold! it was brought within my grasp." When

she rejects that power, the ban keeping her out of Valinor is finally lifted. That is why she can then say "I pass the test . . . I will diminish, and go into the West, and remain Galadriel." But until that moment, she has quite literally been exiled from all of her remaining family for the previous seven *thousand* years of the Second and Third Ages—and none of that can one possibly understand without the background of *The Silmarillion*.

The stories of Arwen and Aragorn, of Elrond, of Gandalf, of Glorfindel, of Éowyn and the Witch-King, of the Men of the West, of Sauron, of the Ents, of the hostility between Dwarves and the Elves, of the Balrog and even of the stars that Frodo and Sam see from Mordor—all of these are, similarly, inextricably bound up with the earlier legends.

But I'd like to stay with Galadriel for a moment, because both she and Celeborn know very well what it is to stare failure in the face and not bow to it: "through ages of the world we have fought the long defeat." She is not just referring to the fading of the Elves at the end of the Third Age: she is referring to the entirety of Elven history, in which the Elves have faced evil that is not in their power to defeat, and have kept fighting regardless. And in that, *The Silmarillion* shares a very close kinship—perhaps the closest kinship of any of Tolkien's works—with the Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon legends that inspired Tolkien in the first place.

I'd like to quote part of Tolkien's own commentary on the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*, because it applies equally well to *The Silmarillion*. Speaking of the pre-Christian English mythology, he points out that both the gods and the heroes of Norse mythology are "within Time, doomed with their allies to death. Their battle is with the monsters and the outer darkness."

Throughout *Beowulf*, the reader is continually reminded that any victory is only temporary. Recall that on the Norse side of things, the world ends when the gods and heroes lose at Ragnarök. In *Beowulf*, every time the hero achieves a great victory, the poet turns around and notes that treachery and destruction will follow eventually. Of the great golden hall of Heorot, that Beowulf defends, the poet writes:

the hall towered,
its gables wide and high and awaiting
a barbarous burning. That doom abided,
but in time it would come: the killer instinct
unleashed among in-laws, the blood-lust rampant.

Though the Shielding nation is described as "not yet familiar with feud and betrayal," such feuding is shown to be unavoidable, and the hall is doomed to fall.

Even events that should be (theoretically!) joyful occasions are marked by this omnipresent foreshadowing of doom: at one point in the poem, it is mentioned that the Danes and the Heathobards, two warring peoples, plan to mend their feud and make peace through the marriage of Freawaru (princess of one tribe) to Ingeld (son of the leader of the other tribe). Although they hope that this woman "will heal old wounds / and grievous feuds," destruction cannot be avoided so easily. Beowulf's prophecy concerns future events, but he speaks as though they have already happened, emphasizing the futility of fighting against fate: the mood of the spearman "will darken," and he will begin to incite violence. This strife is clearly inevitable, which is why Beowulf can speak about these future events as certain and as though they had already happened. Internal strife, feuding between in-laws, is the fatal threat:

Then on both sides the oath-bound lords
will break the peace, a passionate hate
will build up in Ingeld and love for his bride
will falter in him as the feud rankles.

When Beowulf slays the dragon at the end of the poem—and in doing so, saves his people from the immediate threat of a flying fire-breathing creature incinerating them and their homes—the poet ever so cheerfully reminds us that his victory really was pointless. Because Beowulf died in the process of slaying the dragon, he has left his people without a strong leader, and they shall promptly be attacked, raided, and slaughtered by neighbouring tribes.

Within *Beowulf*, then, death is inevitable. Defeat is inevitable. Victories are only temporary.

In his essay "The Monsters and the Critics," Tolkien continues:

> It is the strength of the northern mythological imagination that it faced this problem, put the monsters in the centre, gave them victory but no honour, and found *a potent but terrible solution in naked will and courage*.[2] 'As a working theory absolutely impregnable.' So potent is it, that while the older southern imagination has faded for ever into literary ornament, the northern has power, as it were, to revive its spirit even in our own times. It can work, even as it did work with the goðlauss viking, without gods: marital heroism as its own end. But we may remember that the poet of Beowulf saw clearly: the wages of heroism is death.

That potent but terrible solution is the potent but terrible solution behind the entire action of the First Age of Middle-earth.

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[2] Emphasis mine.

For those who may not have read *The Silmarillion* (or who may have given up before finishing the "Ainulindalë" and the "Valaquenta" and therefore never got to the "Quenta Silmarillion" proper!), I'll summarize in brief:

The Elves originally awoke in Middle-earth, under the stars, but the Valar (akin to angels, the guardians of the world) talked them into travelling over the sea to Valinor, ostensibly for their own safety. The Dark Lord, Morgoth (Sauron's former master), destroyed the two trees of light that provided light in Valinor, and stole the Silmarils, three jewels that were the greatest work of Fëanor, greatest craftsman of the Elves (and ancestor of Celebrimbor, who would later forge the Rings of Power). Fëanor swears a terrible oath of vengeance and leads a great portion of the Elves out of Valinor, and back to their homeland in Middle-earth, to wage war on Morgoth directly, since the Valar don't seem to be doing anything useful:

> [T]urning to the herald he [Fëanor] cried: 'Say this to Manwë Súlimo,[3] High King of Arda: if Fëanor cannot overthrow Morgoth, at least he delays not to assail him, and sits not idle in grief. […] Such hurt at the least will I do to the Foe of the Valar that even the mighty in the Ring of Doom shall wonder to hear it. Yea, in the end they shall follow me. Farewell!"

The Elves who leave Valinor do so knowing that if they do, they can never return.

> [F]rom end to end of the hosts of the Noldor,[4] the voice was heard speaking the curse and prophecy which is called the Prophecy of the North and the Doom of the Noldor. Much it foretold in dark words, which the Noldor understood not until the woes indeed after befell them; but all heart the curse that was uttered upon those that would not stay nor seek the doom and pardon of the Valar.
>
> "Tears unnumbered ye shall shed; and the Valar will fence Valinor against you, and shut you out, so that not even the echo of your lamentation shall pass over the mountains. On the House of Fëanor the wrath of the Valar lieth from the West unto the uttermost East, and upon all that will follow them it shall be laid also. […] To evil end shall all things turn that

[3] Head of the Valar.

[4] One of the peoples of the Elves.

> they being well; and by treason of kin unto kin, and the fear of treason, shall this come to pass. The Dispossessed shall they be for ever."

The Elves then spend the entirety of the First Age of Middle-earth in exile waging war against Morgoth, who is a fallen Vala and therefore has godlike powers and cannot be killed.

They are fighting a hopeless war, a war in which the only possibility is that they will eventually die without having achieved any sort of lasting victory.

Recall what Galadriel said: "through ages of the world we have fought the long defeat."

Within Time, the "monsters" will win. But the Elves refuse to bow to tyranny, refuse to cave in or surrender, refuse to back down. They find, in short, "a potent but terrible solution in naked will and courage."

It's a solution that leads to Fingolfin, High King of the Noldor, challenging Morgoth to single combat before the gates of Angband, Morgoth's fortress.[5] It's a solution that leads to Beren and Lúthien sneaking into the very heart of Angband, because her father has decreed that he'll only approve of the (mortal, human) Beren if the man shows up with a Silmaril from the iron crown of Morgoth himself. It's a solution that leads to the last stand of Fingon at the Battle of Unnumbered Tears, and the last stand of Huor, and the twenty-eight-year imprisonment of Húrin while Morgoth tortures him by making him watch every single horrible thing that happens to his family in that time.

And in perhaps the saddest and yet most beautiful story of the entire legendarium, "The Fall of Gondolin," the hidden city of Gondolin is betrayed to Morgoth by one of its own people. The story is told in much greater detail in *The Book of Lost Tales, Part 2*, but I'll quote from the published *Silmarillion* here:

> the red light mounted the hills in the north and not in the east; and there was no stay in the advance of the foe until they were beneath the very walls of Gondolin, and the city was beleaguered without hope. Of the deeds of desperate valour there done, by the chieftains of the noble houses and their warriors, and not least by Tuor, much is told in The Fall of Gondolin: of the battle of Ecthelion of the Fountain with Gothmog Lord of Balrogs in the very square of the King, where each slew the other, and of the defence of the tower of Turgon by the people of his household, until the tower was overthrown; and mighty was its fall and the fall of Turgon in its ruin.

The city is sacked, the inhabitants are slaughtered, and the few who aren't only make it out alive after terrible sacrifices. Glorfindel (yes, the same Glorfindel who—reincarnated a couple ages later—prophesied that no man would defeat the Witch-King, and who met Aragorn and the hobbits on their way to

[5] I won't comment on this duel here because I'd just end up quoting the passage in its entirety—I can't possibly do it justice. But together with the Fall of Gondolin, it is burned into my memory for all of time.

Rivendell), dueled a Balrog to ensure that Idril and Tuor and Eärendil escaped.

And even then, with their cities in ruins, their lands destroyed, their children and friends and relatives dead—the elves simply don't give up. Even in the face of complete and utter destruction, they fight on.

That is the tragedy, and the power, and the beauty, and—yes—the terror of *The Silmarillion*.

Yes, it's bleak. Yes, it's difficult. Yes, it's complicated and most of the chieftains of the Noldor have similar sounding names—but so do the heroes of the Norse sagas, and if you've ever had to keep Thorkell, Thorlak, Thorleif, Thormar, Thormod, Thorod, Thorolf, and four different Thorsteins straight, Finrod and Finarfin don't look so bad by comparison.

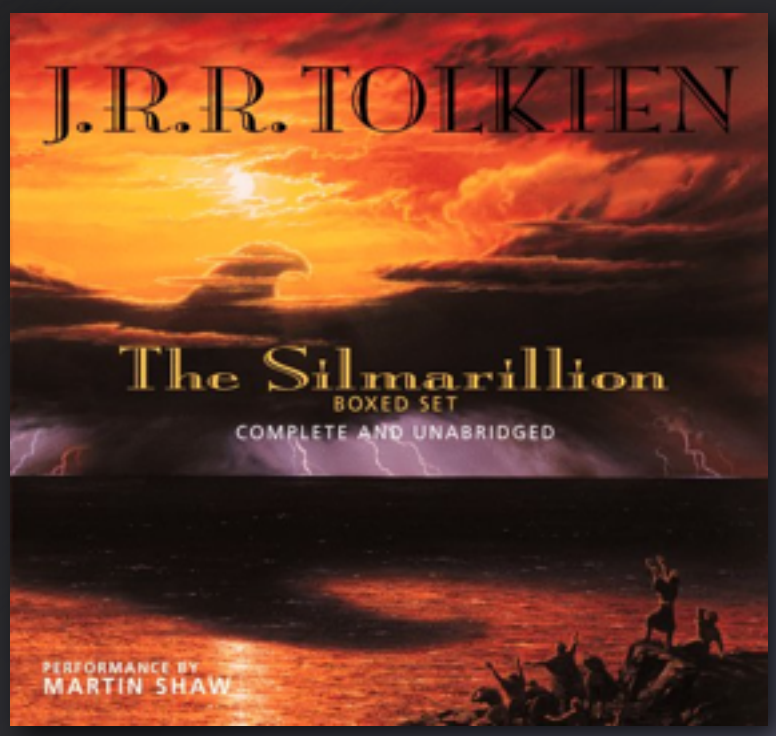
Tolkien wasn't trying to write a novel when he wrote *The Silmarillion*—so yes, the stories don't pretend to follow novelistic conventions. What he was trying to write was a mythology. He knew quite well that readers didn't always have a taste for that—in a 1956 letter, he noted that he did "not think it would have the appeal of the L.R.—no hobbits! Full of mythology, and elvishness, and all that 'heigh style' (as Chaucer might say), which has been so little to the taste of many reviewers."

The mediation provided by the hobbits—more relatable, perhaps, to the average reader than the heroic characters of the older legends—is entirely absent from *The Silmarillion*. As Christopher Tolkien writes in his introduction to *The Book of Lost Tales*, "in 'The Silmarillion' the draught is pure and unmixed; and the reader is worlds away from such 'mediation.'"

Perhaps I'm biased in my love of myths and epics and heroic legends—I've always found them fascinating, and fascinating

I think one of the best ways to enjoy ***The Silmarillion*** —and like Jennifer I enjoy it very much—is to **listen to it**, the way one imagines the ancient sagas were originally performed. The audiobook narrated by Martin Shaw is magnificently done, with stately pace (14 hours, 50 minutes) and impeccable diction. It first came out in December 1998 as a boxed set of 13 CDs. It's still available in that format, but you can also download it from Audible (though apparently not through iTunes).

—Jonathan Crowe



enough to commit several years of my life to completing a doctorate on them. But I think there is something about myths and legends that has fascinated millions of people for thousands of years—because they speak to our hearts and to our imaginations, because they move us, because they inspire us, because they reflect who we are or who we want to be.

And for me the very factors that people object to about *The Silmarillion*—the heightened style, the lack of mediation, the unmixed draught of mythology as it were, the sheer scope and horror of the tragedy and yet the determination that emerges from that tragedy—are what I love most about it.

So if you're expecting a second *Lord of the Rings*—yes, you will be disappointed in *The Silmarillion*.

But if you're looking for timeless myths?

Pick it up. Skip the endless list of names in the "Valaquenta" and start with the "Quenta Silmarillion" proper if you have to, and keep a finger in the back of the book to refer to the family tree of Fingolfin, Finrod, and the rest if you get confused. They really are distinct characters in their own rights, and if you stick with it, you should have no trouble telling them apart. Don't expect it to be something it's not, but appreciate it for everything that it is, and let the stories do the rest of the work.

—Jennifer Hurd

An earlier version of this essay appeared on the author's blog on 4 September 2013.

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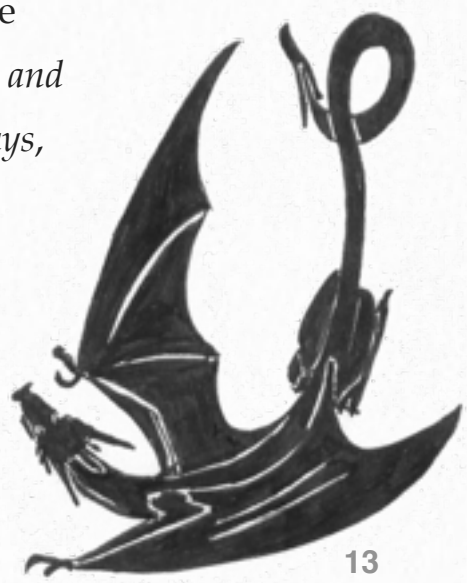


Peter Jackson Has Ruined Everything

The problem with the *Hobbit* movies isn't just that they're bloated and long. It's that they're children's books upconverted to epics. Their length and bloat is a side effect.

Ever since the *Lord of the Rings* movies came out, moviemakers have been looking for the next epic fantasy megablockbuster series that will make them billions. Their mistake has been to take children's books (not YA) and shoehorn in all kinds of epic material.

Children's fantasy novels like C. S. Lewis's Narnia books are short and simple; they tend to lack the sort of epic battles that take Weta Digital a year to render, so those get added, along with all kinds of plot complications. Because fantasy movies must have epic battles. And subplots. And character growth and conflict of a certain kind. And saved cats.

I'd lump *The Hobbit* in with the three Narnia movies: small children's books that were made into something they never were, to satisfy the demands of epic fantasy movies.

Demands that are in place because Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* movies defined the archetype of What a Fantasy Movie Is: a gigantic epic based on a beloved fantasy series.

Ironically, the three *Lord of the Rings* movies don't suffer from this problem to nearly the same extent. In fact, *The Fellowship of the Ring* is is a textbook example of how to *compress* a dense fantasy novel: it simplifies the plot and does in a couple of minutes what Tolkien required several chapters to set up.

(I sometimes think that *Fellowship* is the way it is because Jackson and company had a model: the Ralph Bakshi *Lord of the Rings*, elements of which strongly echo in Jackson's version. Once Jackson and company moved past the Bakshi version they were on their own . . . and I think it shows.)

In book form, *The Fellowship of the Ring* is roughly 177,000 words long. The theatrical release was nearly three hours long. For *The Hobbit*, Jackson took nearly eight hours (over

three films) to dramatize a book that was only 95,000 words long. (Note that, as Genevieve Valentine pointed out, the TV version of *The Hobbit* was able to do it in just 90 minutes.)

But in hindsight, *Fellowship* looks like an anomaly. The next two movies revealed an increasing tendency to set up set-piece battles, as though movies stop being about storytelling and start being about getting the pieces in place for a major epic battle scene that's going to be awesome, just you wait and see once Weta Digital finishes with the rendering. *The Two Towers* was all about Helm's Deep, *The Return of the King* about the Pelennor Fields.

It's toy-soldier filmmaking, to the point where the Black Gate—and the actual destruction of the Ring—could only be anticlimax, something that takes place while we're all wandering about with a bit of a concussion after being visually bombarded with all that computer-generated violence.

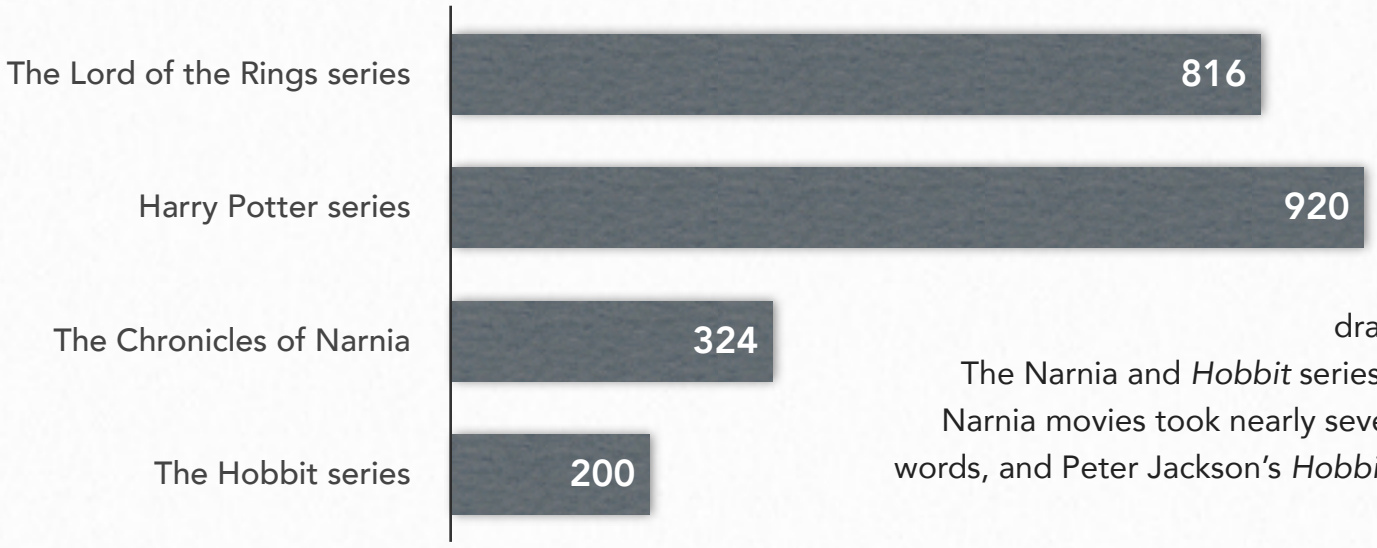
Jackson *lingers* on these scenes where Tolkien dealt with them swiftly and with extreme brevity. I became even more convinced of this when I saw *King Kong* (2005), where the combat scenes went on and on and on and my God it was gratuitous.

Thanks to *The Lord of the Rings* and the success of this kind of filmmaking, computer-generated battle scenes became not just the norm in fantasy movies, but a *requirement*. One that was necessary regardless of whether it was present in, or even appropriate to, the original source material. One that, for example, badly crippled *The Golden Compass* (2007), reorganizing the story order and amplifying a minor melee but amputating what would otherwise have been—literally!—a killer ending.

Because the Narnia books were based on children's books of limited scope and length (the longest of the three Narnia books to be filmed, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, is 52,000 words), they required plot loops, reversals and additional battles to inject adult- (or young-adult-)-grade dramatic tension and epic scale. A duel and brief skirmish in the book version of *Prince Caspian* became one bloody battle after another in the movie.

On the other hand, the *Harry Potter* movies have managed to avoid this bloat. Its filmmakers have managed to cover much more material in much less time. At 257,000 words, *Order of the Phoenix* was the longest book of the series, and yet the movie managed to get through it in 138 minutes. That translates to 1,863 words of novel per minute of movie, twice as dense as *Fellowship* and three times as dense as *The Return of the King*. Even *Deathly Hallows*, split into two movies, was less bloated in terms of words per minute: the 198,000-word novel became 276 minutes of film. At 718 words per minute, it's comparable to *The Lord of the Rings*, twice as compact as the Narnia movies, and three and a half times as compact as *The Hobbit* (see the graph on page 16).

Now we turn to *The Hobbit*, a book whose tone and purpose are at odds with the epic fantasy that Tolkien would later write. Adam Roberts argues that before Tolkien him-



The Lord of the Rings took 9⅓ hours to dramatize 455,000 words, or 816 words per minute; the Harry Potter films took 19⅔ hours to dramatize just over a million words. The Narnia and *Hobbit* series were far less efficient: the three Narnia movies took nearly seven hours to portray only 133,000 words, and Peter Jackson's *Hobbit* movies took nearly eight hours to show only 95,000 words.

self retconned the Quest of Erebor into a Serious Matter (see *The Return of the King*'s appendices and "The Quest for Erebor" in *Unfinished Tales*), *The Hobbit* was a tale of how Bilbo, Thorin and Company managed to bumble their way through an Adventure.

> This situation is played broadly for laughs because Bilbo is so patently unfitted to the business of adventuring. 'Unfitness' also seems to characterise the dwarves, mind you: the party stumbles from disaster to disaster as they journey, escaping death by hairs' breadths half a dozen times at the hands of trolls, goblins, wolves, spiders and hostile elves. They are saved from their early misadventures by Gandalf's interventions, for though eccentric he is considerably more competent than they. Later, though, Gandalf goes off on his own business, and the party has to rescue itself. As they continue to stumble into a series of potentially fatal pickles, they somehow manage, by a combination of luck and hobbit-judgment, always to get away. Indeed, following Bilbo's development from massively incompetent to marginally incompetent is one of the pleasures of the narrative.

The Hobbit is, then, the *antithesis* of epic: though devoid of romance (or any women whatsoever!), it has more in common with *Stardust* or *The Princess Bride* than it does with its own sequel. (Can you imagine how Peter Jackson would have made those movies? How about *Lud-in-the-Mist*? Or *Among Others*?)

In Jackson's hands, *The Hobbit* is not only forced to fulfill the requirements of epic fantasy movies, it also falls victim to Jackson's worst, more-is-better excesses, with excruciatingly long battle scenes, crude character conflicts, and a heavy-handed touch to even the most delicate of scenes.

But at least everything *looks* magnificent.

I've heard the *Hobbit* movies described as Peter Jackson's personal fanfic. What they remind me of is something I tried doing as a child: retyping *The Hobbit* with "corrections" to bring it into line with *The Lord of the Rings*: adding accents, replacing "the Elvenking" with "Thranduil" and so forth. I gave up after a few pages.

Peter Jackson and company obviously did not.

—Jonathan Crowe

Tolkien and I

I HAVE A CONFESSION to make, one that will likely shake the sea and the dry land from the dread East to the far West: I have never really liked *The Lord of the Rings*.

And by this I do not mean that I scorn it as Michael Moorcock or China Miéville have on the basis of its pastoralist and classist and racist tendencies. I have read their criticisms, looking to join them, because facing the vast and vehement love for *The Lord of the Rings* in the English-speaking fan world, it is easier to respond with an equally vehement hatred than to give my honest feelings which are "Meh. The prose is pretty. I have no feelings."

In Grade Eleven I wrote a humorous speech about this very problem for the French public speaking contest, about the fact that I could not finish the *Le seigneur des anneaux*. I joked that it was a curse. I think my performance of the speech made it to provincial finals. A dozen years later, I learned enough about myself to know that it was not a curse; I just didn't find the story interesting. I did not care what happened to these people.

But, I hear the cries, "You're a linguist! And a fantasy writer!" (I suppose after two M.A. qualifying papers and two professional sales, I've met a minimum standard to call myself both of these things, strange as that seems.) "Tolkien was the most famous linguist-and-fantasy-writer out there! Surely you must feel a kinship!"

Perhaps it is *because* I am a linguist and a fantasy writer, and in both ways come from very different influences than he did, that I feel less kinship to a 1950s Oxford don rather than more.

My introduction to what linguists do was not Tolkien: it was Claude Shannon, and Barbara Partee and Richard Montague and Angelika Kratzer, and the modern greats at the border where linguistics intersects with math and computer science, not where it intersects with literary studies where Tolkien's fellow philologists dwelt.

My introduction to what fantasists do was not Tolkien either; it would have been, long ago in the dim days, in translation, Kipling and Zelazny and Oscar Wilde, Selma Lagerlöf, Tove Jansson and Astrid Lingren, E. T. A. Hoffman and Wilhelm Hauff; and in Russian, Kir Bulychov and Samuil Marshak and Alexander Belyaev, and first of all, Nikolai Gogol. (He would have been my introduction to fantastic horror, although I've been told Gogol owed traditional Ukrainian poets and storytellers a huge and unacknowledged debt when he put their images and turns of phrase in the language of the Russian imperialist culture.)

There is nothing wrong with Tolkien's passion for pastoral England, but I felt no kinship with it. There is nothing wrong with Tolkien's passion for the beauty of Old English and Old Norse, Welsh and Finnish, and Latin and Classical Greek. But while he was absorbed in it, far out in the dim West beyond an ocean and on the far edge of a continent that was not Valinor, linguists who were not philologists fixated on written languages were finding the beauty in languages with patterns he could not possibly imagine. Among them was a certain anthropologist named Alfred Kroeber, who left his own legacy on English-language fantasy through educating his daughter in the diversity and uniqueness of human cultures, and she became Ursula K(roeber) Le Guin.

Welsh and Norse are beautiful, yes, but so are St'át'imcets and Washo and Cheyenne, Zulu and Wolof and Tamil and Tibetan and Thai, and yes, Ukrainian. Tolkien may have opened many people's minds to the beauty of invented language and of fantasy through his work, and may have inspired the zeal of the first-converted. But those of us who came to language and fantasy through other ways have the right to say that we do not hate him, but he doesn't speak to us. There are many paths to fantasy. Any single one of them, whether Tolkien or anti-Tolkien, should not be used as a standard for truth.

And I do love *The Silmarillion*, because I feel Tolkien was better at writing myths and sagas than novels, but that is a tale for another day.

—Tamara Vardomskaya

Tamara Vardomskaya's short stories are beginning to be published. Two have appeared so far, with one more that I know of still to come.

- "**The Metamorphoses of Narcissus**" appeared in issue #166 (January 8, 2015) of *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*.
- "**Acrobatic Duality**" appeared on Tor.com on February 11, 2015.

Both can be read online for free and are also available as ebooks; "Metamorphoses" is also available as an audio podcast.

chicago linguistic society

Dear Elrond son of Eärendil (University of Rivendell),

We regret to inform you that your paper, "A Discussion of Verb Tense Marking of Quenya and Sindarin," has not been selected for presentation at the 49th annual meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society.

We received over 350 abstracts for presentation, and have been unable to include many strong abstracts.

Below you will find anonymous reviewers' comments on your work. We hope they will prove useful in your research.

Regards,
CLS 49 Organizers

Reviewer 1:

Sheer drivel. The author includes no citations past 1973, and seems completely unfamiliar with advances in linguistic theory since. Are they living in another world or something? Their analysis utterly ignores the work of Brooks (1999), Brooks (2005), Brooks (2010) or Brooks (2011). I strongly recommend rejecting this paper.

Organizers' note: This reviewer most emphatically is not Brooks, we assure you. Not Brooks.

Reviewer 2:

This is an interesting paper on a complex topic, presenting interesting data. However, this paper only refers to Quenya and Sindarin (without placing them in language families or telling how many speakers they have). A better analysis would include comparisons with other languages, such as Tamil, Ukrainian or Inuktitut.

I was also rather skeptical at the data from speakers aged 3,000–8,000 years old. Is the author serious?

How should we interpret the differences in speech between "Noldor" and "Vanyar"—what are the social implications of these groupings?

I am also concerned that the speakers sourced are all male except for speaker Galadriel; it is a common truism in modern sociolinguistics that women tend to innovate more in their speech, and the author should certainly have investigated the speech of more women. The author mentions contact with Men as a possible language influence but what about contact with Women?

Some indication of the differences between socioeconomic classes would have been nice: basing a language analysis only on the speech of warriors and Silmaril-artisans leads to very limited results. What do "Noldor" and "Sindar" truck drivers and retail workers speak like?

All in all, I regretfully recommend rejecting this paper. Better luck at CLS 50!

Why the Eagles Can't Carry the Ring

THE FAN THEORY that irks me the most is the Eagles theory of *The Lord of the Rings* in its various permutations.

These theories posit that Gandalf either intended the ring bearer to be carried into Mordor by the Eagles, or that Gwaihir should have borne the Ring himself.

They're theories that pay little attention to the themes in the book, or how it addresses the issue of power.

After all:

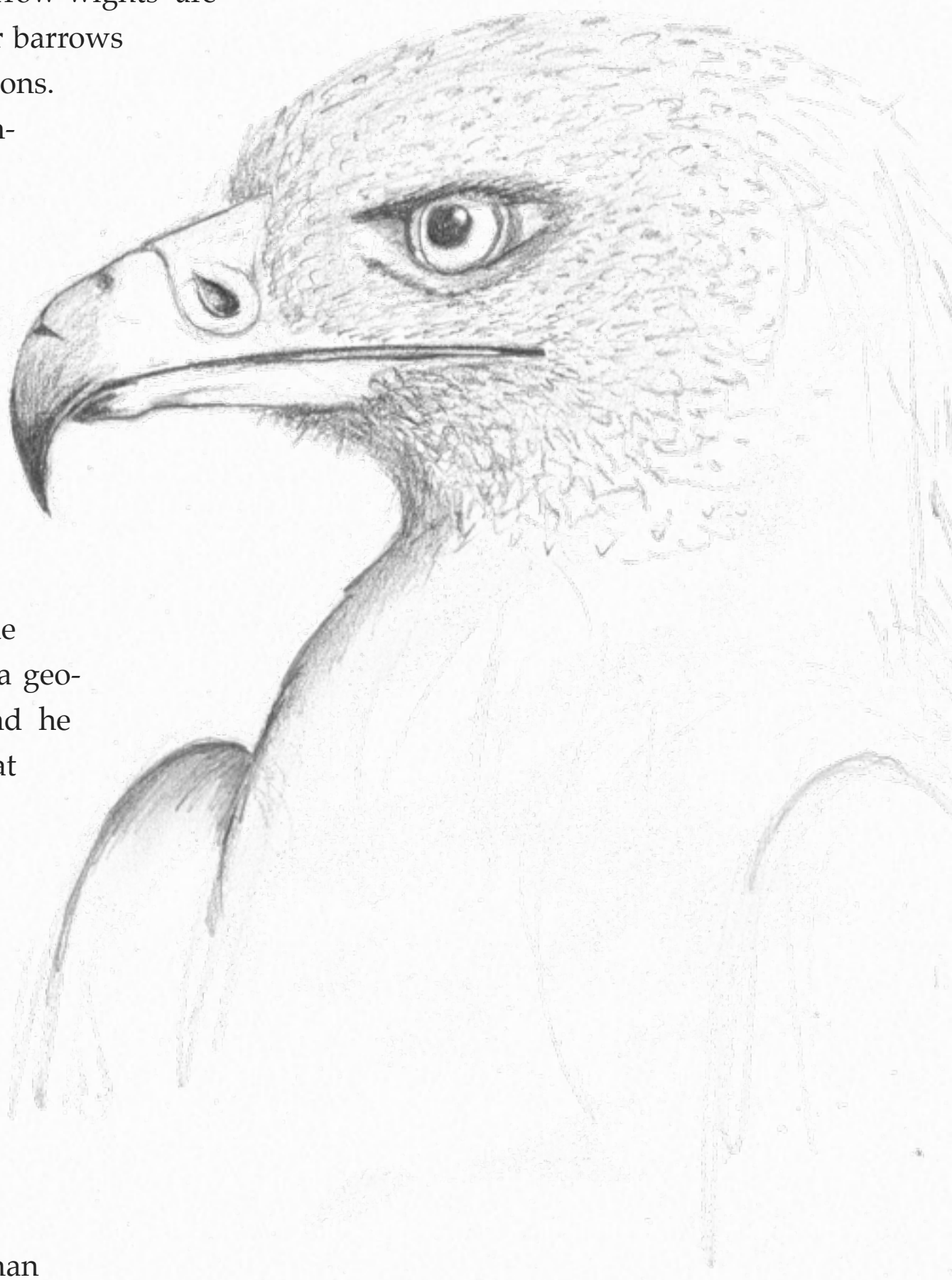
1. It's uncontroversial that Gwaihir and the eagles constitute a Power of Middle-earth. I mean they're the messengers of Manwë—they're basically angelic superbirds. And that's why it's a *bad* thing for them to be anywhere near the One Ring. You know, the Ring that Gandalf won't even touch for fear of temptation, the Ring that Galadriel refuses for fear of temptation. Two of the bearers of the Three—two of the most willful and powerful beings in Middle-earth—know that the greater the power, the greater the temptation.

That's why they let a couple of freaking hobbits carry the Ring. The hobbits, small and quiet agrarians sheltered in the most tranquil enclave of the West, sheltered by the Old Forest on their eastern outskirt, are the antithesis of a Power. And that is why they can better withstand the Ring. Heck, all it ever really does for them is help them hide and escape better. Does anyone really believe that's the entirety of the power of the Ring?

And does anybody think a Middle-earth ruled by a Ring-corrupted Gwaihir is anywhere that anybody would want to live?

2. Also about power, the Powerful of Middle-earth are constrained. Bombadil can't

leave the Old Forest. The barrow-wights are best dispelled by breaking their barrows and scattering their possessions. The Ents hesitate to leave Fangorn and when they do, they don't go very far. When Saruman is cast out of Isengard he loses much of his power. When Sauron is cast from Dol Goldur he is diminished until he re-establishes himself in Mordor. Elrond never leaves Rivendell. Galadriel never leaves Lothlórien. The only Power who doesn't have a geographical locus is Gandalf, and he bears the one of the Three that seems best suited to a nomad. (And the Nazgûl, who are also ring-bearers.)



As for the Eagles? They have the Misty Mountains, and they rarely stray far from them. When Gwaihir, who owes Gandalf a personal debt, carries Gandalf those two times, it's once from Isengard to Rohan and once from Moria to Lothlórien. In both cases, it's from a location *in* the Misty Mountains to the closest possible location outside them. The Eagles also don't carry the dwarves and Bilbo far from the mountains in *The Hobbit*.

They only stray out for the big battles. And they never stray for long. I suspect it taxes the strength of the Eagles to be that far from their home.

—*Simon McNeil*

Put Glorfindel Back!

We, the members of the DERANGED SOCIETY OF GLORFINDEL ADHERENTS, PROTEST the removal of one of TOLKIEN's finest characters from dramatic presentations of THE LORD OF THE RINGS.

GLORFINDEL plays a crucial role in THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING, bringing aid to Frodo after being grievously wounded by the Nazgûl, and sending safely across the FORDS OF BRUINEN atop his white horse, ASFALOTH. But you wouldn't know it from the movies. In EVERY DRAMATIZATION of the novel, GLORFINDEL has been replaced by SOMEONE ELSE.

LEGOLAS GREENLEAF
The Lord of the Rings (1978)
"Not a real blond"

ARWEN UNDÓMIEL
The Fellowship of the Ring (2001)
"Only 78.13% Elf"

In RALPH BAKSHI's *THE LORD OF THE RINGS* (1978), he is replaced by LEGOLAS, whose undistinguished father lives in a POTEMKIN MENEGROTH with SILVAN ELVES who couldn't give a damn about his BELERIAND NOSTALGIA. In PETER JACKSON's *THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING* (2001), he is replaced by ARWEN UNDÓMIEL, an excessively lachrymose daughter of ELROND who BARELY HAS A SPEAKING ROLE in the original books.

What the hell were they thinking? GLORFINDEL is a THOROUGHLY BADASS AND AWESOME CHARACTER. He is the BOBA FETT of Middle-earth.

In the FIRST AGE he SLEW A GODDAMN BALROG while escaping from the FALL OF GONDOLIN, thereby SAVING TUOR, IDRIL AND EÄRENDIL and the refugees of GONDOLIN. During the BATTLE OF FORNOST in the year 1975 of the Third Age he HANDED THE WITCH-KING OF ANGMAR'S ASS TO HIM and prophesied that this LORD OF THE NAZGÛL would not fall by the hand of man. HE WAS RIGHT.

Some of you will no doubt point to Roger Ebert's LAW OF ECONOMY OF CHARACTERS: he's got a BIT PART early on in the story and then DISAPPEARS. A character like that should be COMBINED with an EXISTING CHARACTER who is important later. Like LEGOLAS. Or ARWEN.

THIS IS BULLSHIT.

By that logic, ASFALOTH should have been replaced by SHADOWFAX, since we don't need two white horses

in the same series. BUT HE WASN'T. Because GLORFINDEL'S FUCKING HORSE was deemed more important than GLORFINDEL HIMSELF.

DID WE MENTION HE KILLED A BALROG?

You want to follow the Law of Economy of Characters? FINE. The next time someone films *THE LORD OF THE RINGS*, REPLACE SOMEONE ELSE WITH GLORFINDEL.

The DERANGED SOCIETY has a few HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS:

OPTION #1: GLORFINDEL REPLACES LEGOLAS

THE PROFESSOR HIMSELF said that LEGOLAS accomplished the least of the NINE WALKERS. So let's swap him out for one of the few remaining Elves in Middle-earth with an EARNED REPUTATION for ASS-KICKING. When the FELLOWSHIP encounters the BALROG in MORIA, watch GLORFINDEL crack his neck and say, "DUDES, I GOT THIS ONE."

OPTION #2: GLORFINDEL REPLACES CELEBORN

CELEBORN doesn't do all that much either, other than, as GALADRIEL'S SPOUSE, keeping GIMLI from making an even bigger FOOL of himself. But as a SINDARIN ELF he's not quite the match of the woman who was the mightiest Noldo in Valinor SAVE FËANOR HIMSELF; also, HE'S HER COUSIN. Let's be honest: pairing her off with GLORFINDEL is TRADING UP.

OPTION #3: GLORFINDEL REPLACES LEGOLAS <u>AND</u> CELEBORN

Double your pleasure as GLORFINDEL takes on TWO ROLES, because he's THAT AWESOME.

When GLORFINDEL takes the FELLOWSHIP to LOTHLÓRIEN, he's hoping for a long-delayed conjugal visit with GALADRIEL. But matters are complicated by GIMLI being completely smitten with his smoking hot wife. The dramatic possibilities inspired by an awkward love triangle between GLORFINDEL, GALADRIEL and GIMLI are WAY BETTER than the LEGOLAS-GIMLI BROMANCE and COURTLY LOVE BULLSHIT.

OPTION #4: GLORFINDEL REPLACES ARWEN

Look, it's 2015. Be more open-minded. Does the thought of ARAGORN labouring through the long years to win the hand of the FAIR GLORFINDEL really seem that strange nowadays?

And it's not like homosexuality is unheard-of in Middle-earth. BILBO and FRODO are CONFIRMED BACHELORS, and you know what THAT'S CODE FOR. And doesn't the relationship between FRODO, SAM and GOLLUM in *THE TWO TOWERS* sound like a typical BDSM-inflected drama-filled POLY TRIAD?

OPTION #5: GLORFINDEL REPLACES SAURON

The Law of Economy of Characters says that the NOTED ACTOR in the SMALL ROLE turns out to be the BAD GUY in the END.

So let's have GLORFINDEL turn out to be SAURON HIMSELF.

But why would GLORFINDEL/SAURON help FRODO escape from his own SERVANTS?

To MAINTAIN HIS COVER, and because his servants are never entirely TRUSTWORTHY; because he can assess for himself whether FRODO'S RING is in fact THE ONE RING. And what better way to bring THE RING back home to him than in THE HANDS OF A WITLESS HALFLING?

It would have worked, too, if it weren't for that MEDDLING GOLLUM.

But if THE PROFESSOR was a screenwriter today, THIS IS HOW IT WOULD HAVE TURNED OUT. And GLORFINDEL would have a thoroughly JUICY ROLE that would NEVER BE CUT from the movie!

Galadriel Is Elrond's Mother-in-Law

IN MIDDLE-EARTH, almost everyone is related to almost everyone else, several times over. Take Elrond and Galadriel: two of the most senior Elves in Middle-earth at the end of the Third Age. They're not just allies, they're family.

To begin with, Galadriel is Elrond's mother-in-law (and Arwen's grandmother): she's the mother of Celebrían, whom Elrond married in the year 109 of the Third Age.

But Elrond and Galadriel are also blood relatives. On the Noldorin side, Elrond, as the son of Eärendil and Idril, is the grandson of Turgon King of Gondolin and the great-grandson of Fingolfin; Galadriel is the daughter of Fingolfin's brother Finarfin. So Elrond is Galadriel's first cousin three times removed.

And they're also blood relatives on their Telerin/Sindarin sides. Galadriel's mother was Eärwen daughter of Olwë, whereas Elrond is the great-great-grandson of Olwë's brother Thingol: his mother was Elwing, daughter of Dior, whose mother was Lúthien daughter of Thingol. Which makes Elrond Galadriel's second cousin twice removed on that side.

But it doesn't stop there! Because Galadriel's husband Celeborn is also in the mix. According to one account in the *Unfinished Tales* (Tolkien had yet to settle on a final version before he died), Celeborn's brother, Galathil, is the father of Nimloth, Dior's wife and Elwing's mother, which makes Celeborn not only Elrond's father-in-law, but his great-granduncle too. And Galathil was apparently the son of Elmo, another brother of Thingol and Olwë, which would not only make Celeborn Elrond's second cousin twice removed in addition to great-granduncle, but also Galadriel's second cousin.

All of which makes Arwen her own distant cousin several times over.

No wonder the Eldar consented to unions with the Edain over their history: they needed fresh genetic material to compensate for their excessive inbreeding. Not that it helped much: they kept tapping the same genetic source.

The three unions of the Eldar and the Edain were Beren and Lúthien, Tuor and Idril, and Aragorn and Arwen. Beren (Elrond's great-grandfather on his mother's side) and Tuor (his paternal grandfather), were themselves first cousins twice removed. And because Aragorn is descended from Elrond's brother Elros, Arwen is actually Aragorn's cousin—his first cousin, 61 times removed.

It's not strictly incestuous—though Túrin and Nienor did their best, and Maeglin certainly wanted to—but it's *really* endogamous.

—Jonathan Crowe

‘Remembrances’ and *Intolerance*: On Meeting Somtow Sucharitkul

IT WAS SOMETHING I would drop everything else to see: the Logan Centre was screening D. W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* (1916) with a live piano score. Which would have been only mildly interesting to me except that the live piano score was by Bangkok Opera director Somtow Sucharitkul.

Back when I was a little nine- or ten-year-old, my brother somehow acquired his first copy of an sf magazine. It was *Asimov’s*, the March 1982 issue. It fell into my hands, and I read it from cover to cover, again and again and again. At that time I remembered titles, not authors, except that the cover story, “Renascence,” was by a Mary, obviously a woman. (Mary Kittredge, who ISFDB tells me only published four short stories and one novel.) That was enough to subconsciously convince this little girl that yes, women wrote English sf and so can you (the question of whether women wrote Russian sf was a more difficult one).

From current online discussions of diversity in sf, a newcomer can be forgiven for the impression that sf only started admitting women and minorities like, last year, and before that has been all straight white males ex-

cept, grudgingly, Ursula Le Guin, Anne McCaffrey, Joanna Russ and Octavia Butler. To those of us who grew up on old science fiction, this does a disservice to all the brilliant women writers of the twentieth century. And although it is trickier to know which writers were people of colour, if they chose to write under pseudonyms or not go to conventions, there was certainly Somtow Sucharitkul, who was and is very clearly not a WASP. And whose story "Remembrances" was the one that I read the most in that *Asimov's* issue, and can still to this day recite entire paragraphs of.

It told the story of twin royal children, Kerin and Elloran, whose beautiful homeworld is destroyed by Inquestors' child soldiers (having evacuated most of the human population in cryosleep first because "Inquestors are compassionate"). The twins are separated. Fifty years later, Elloran has become a prominent Inquestor; Kerin, on the other hand, is reluctantly training as a Rememberer of the worlds that Inquestors destroy, and since the training happens on a ship moving at relativistic speeds, to her only one year has passed when she meets Elloran again and is repelled and horrified by him becoming one of the destroyers.

What grabbed me were the lavish descriptions of art and music. "For Elloran could go nowhere without music; he found the silence too painful. There were too many memories to be found in silence."

Time passed, that tattered *Asimov's* issue vanished, and many years later I tracked down *Utopia Hunters* (1984) the fix-up that Somtow published of the Inquestor stories of Elloran's life. Re-reading it, and "Remembrances" itself in edited form, I found the worldbuilding thinner than I would have noticed at age ten: *why* were the Inquestors going around destroying worlds as soon as the worlds got utopian? (Wouldn't just keeping them from getting perfect be a much subtler move?) And why was the rest of the galaxy putting up with this? I also acquired Somtow's *Mallworld* (1991), but bounced hard off the first few pages, because I just couldn't agree to follow a character who was illiterate by choice.

I've read one story written since Somtow adopted the "S. P. Somtow" byline rather than "Somtow Sucharitkul": "Dragon's Fin Soup" (1995), a lovely fantasy story of a young woman from Bangkok's Chinese minority returning to her parents' restaurant business after an education (and queer sexual awakening) in the United States. I do intend to read more. And more recently, I've followed his blog. He has returned to his original musical roots (the sf writing was apparently a cure for musical creative block) and now blogs about opera production and composition and, quite intelligently, about the Thai political situation.

I did watch YouTube excerpts of his opera compositions and stagings. But this would be my first and perhaps only chance to see live the man whose story had hit me so deeply at such an impressionable age.

So, no matter what other invitations on my time there were, and there were other invitations, my Saturday evening was reserved, come hell or high water.

I think most of the attendees were older, and there to see *Intolerance*. They were also just about all white, with a handful of Asian faces; I don't recall seeing any black people, which is unusual for gatherings on the South Side of Chicago in general, but I don't blame most black people for fully forming their opinion of D. W. Griffith for *Birth of a Nation* (1915) no matter what he tried to do afterwards. Even if this is the film that is responsible for the invention of false eyelashes.

I was the only person sitting in the stage right section closest to the stage, so I could see the great Steinway on stage right. I wasn't here for the film, really; I would come watch Somtow play scales.

So the organizer of the South Side Projections group, a youngish man in a suit whose name was Michael Phillips, came out to introduce the project, saying that he had known Somtow for about twenty years now, since the latter had been a writer and was invited to give readings at the University of Central Michigan. Then the man himself came out.

The director of the Bangkok Opera and personal friend of the Thai royal family doubtless owns many suits and tuxedos, but tonight he came out in jeans, running shoes and a baggy sweater in colourful horizontal stripes. He is short and portly with a ready smile. In the videos he would occasionally post to his blog when I first started reading it in 2007, his hair was shoulder-length and still black with a grey streak; it has grown longer and much greyer. His accent reveals that he was educated at Eton and Cambridge.

(Only as I write this does it occur to me to wonder if Somtow and the King of Thailand, HRM Bhumibol Adulyadej—the fact that the King is a very competent jazz saxophonist and big-band composer is my favourite trivia tidbit on celebrity hobbies—have ever played music together. Which is quite awesome to contemplate, but slightly awkward to ask about.)

"I would like to tell you that I am doing this for the very first time," he said, about

playing a piano score for a silent movie. "When I was a boy in England, forty-five years ago, I was taken to see a screening of this film, which had a live piano score. And I wanted to do that. Forty-five years later, on Facebook, I say that this is my wish to play piano for *Intolerance*. And twelve thousand miles away, Michael Phillips says, 'Done!' Of course, this turned out to be twelve thousand miles minus a hundred miles," as he is currently in Milwaukee working on the premiere of his opera *The Snow Dragon*.

"I assure you that prior to this I have not watched this film for at least several weeks, so this will be completely improvised. They've given me an excellent piano; I was trying it out earlier. So any mistakes you will hear are not the piano's fault."

I would later see that Somtow had a flat-screen monitor on the piano, so he could see the movie as it was being projected on the big screen. Although event notifications before the big date had said that the 1989 edition of the film wasn't available, it was the 1989 edition that we finally watched.

I wish I knew more about what chord progressions Somtow was using, but the one intelligent thing I can say was that it was nearly all minor. Which, as you may guess, was fine by me. He did vary up the rhythm quite a bit, giving a waltz rhythm to the waltz scenes. Basically, it was remarkably beautiful.

After the show, I was very tired, because it was close to eleven p.m. and well past my bedtime. And why the heck did it matter what I may say to Somtow about a story he had written 33 years ago, more than half his lifetime ago, as a different person— on the other hand, as I've said before, I try not to pass up showing artists my appreciation, no matter how proficient they are. And I'm sure he probably knows that these days he isn't much talked about in sf circles with their Noah Problem;[1] I want him to know that some people still think he matters.

So as I came out to the lobby, I approached him as he was talking to a group of people, sipping a Diet Coke, and muttering that he had forgotten how *long* the battle scenes were, and said basically something like the following:

"Thank you for the beautiful music, and . . . I just want to say thank you. I was first introduced to English short science fiction via a secondhand copy of the March 1982 *Asimov's*, in which there was your story 'Remembrances.' It was my favourite story of the collection. This year I've finally begun to publish my own stories of science fiction influenced by the arts, and . . . you've been an influence. I just want to thank you."

"Why, thank you very much." He did seem a bit touched. I asked if I could take a picture of him and the woman he was talking to offered to take the picture of me with him. I

---

[1] During the Flood, Noah could only take part of his library onto the Ark, so let us pretend that all other books never existed or mattered. A figure of speech coined by John Goldsmith to describe a problem with the received history of many fields, not just sf.

usually do not ask to get my picture taken with famous people or things when I encounter them—the important thing is them, not me—but in this case, I decided to make an exception.

I can't account for whether his smile is more artificial than real. He didn't ask my name as a writer, either. But hey, he was a sixty-two-year-old man who had just been playing and intensively improvising for three hours and it was late in the evening; I was not going to demand to be his centre of attention. Having gotten my picture, I stepped aside.

Maybe we will meet again. Conductors tend to be long-lived, and I hope he has many creative years still ahead of him.

I picked up my coat and went home, still a little giddy with what many people would call "fangirl squee."

As for the film—because yeah, there was a century-old film getting played.

It was certainly pioneering in cinematic techniques and dramatic structure; I like the description of it as the only cinematic fugue. The cinematography was at all times elegant and very well composed. For modern eyes, the dramatic statements and writing everything out seem a bit heavy-handed, and the Babylonian girls look very, very early twentieth century. Constance Talmadge's Mountain Girl is pretty awesome despite this, and no wonder this character made the actress's career. The touches of humour are great.

What was amusing about the intertitles was their occasional notes on historical accuracy, in a perceptibly different font than the main text of the intertitle: e.g. explaining that Catherine de Medici's ministers are arriving in the prelude to St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, and beneath it listing the names of the historical ministers involved, or mentioning the excavations and papyruses that describe the betrayal of Babylon to Cyrus the Great. The unnecessary academic precision looks awkward, at least to modern eyes.

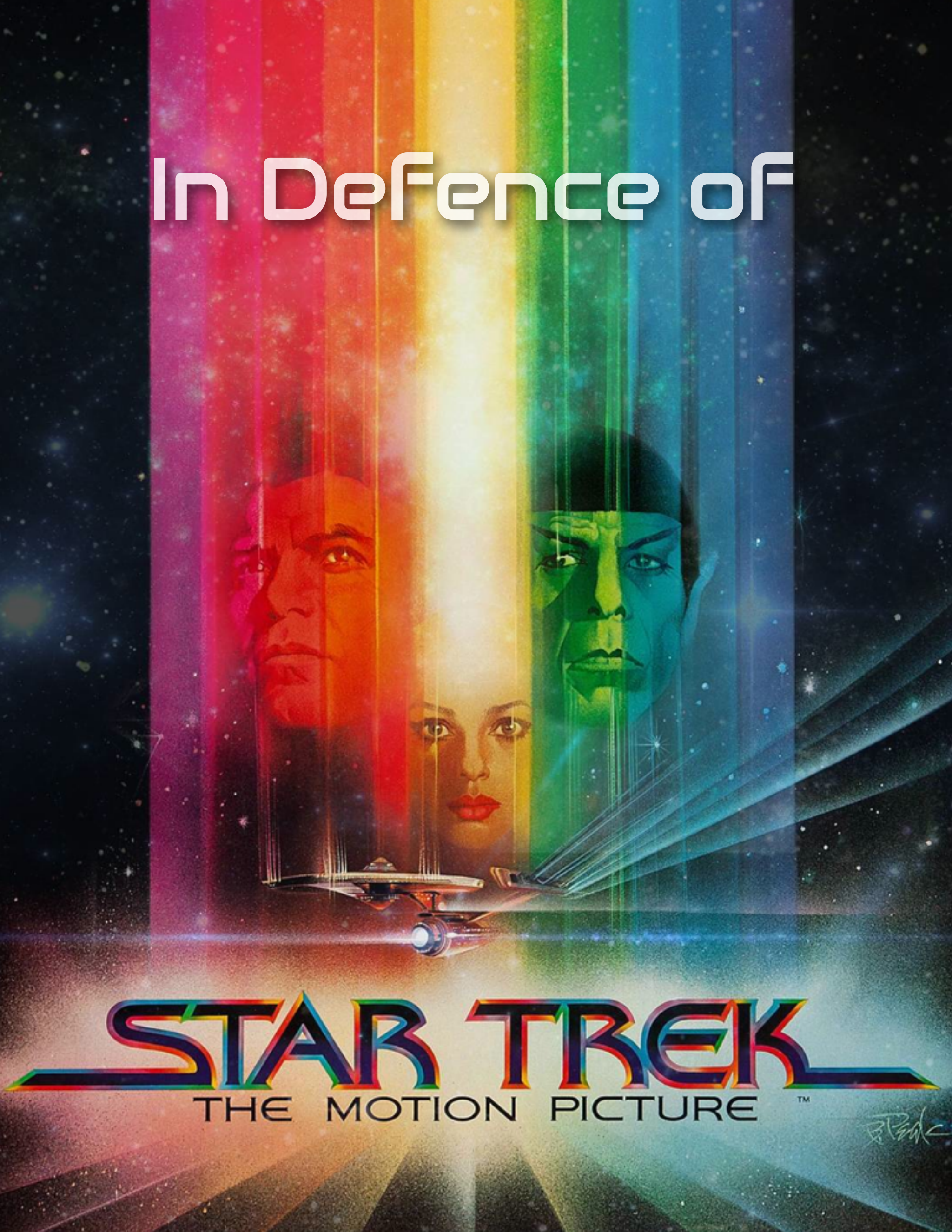
The way the event invitation framed it, *Intolerance* was implied to be an apology for *Birth of a Nation*. I've since read up on it: the plea for tolerance was intended for the critics who hated *Birth of a Nation*, without any acknowledgement that just maybe they had a point.

Although I *could* interpret the film as a plea to have us all love one another, no matter creed, class or colour, there is only one black person appearing in the entire film (a train porter in the modern storyline). Griffith and his screenwriters try to evoke sympathy across class boundaries (modern storyline) and religious boundaries (Babylonian, Huguenot and Judean storylines). And I guess between men and women. The message could be read as "Love one another, people (but those over there, I don't consider people)." It's not really an answer to *Birth of a Nation* criticism; it's an avoidance of the question.

(I haven't seen more than very brief clips of *Birth of a Nation*. I likely will someday, because of its cinematic importance.)

—*Tamara Vardomskaya*

In Defence of



I DUG OUT MY *STAR TREK* DVDs when I heard that Leonard Nimoy died, and I suspect I'm not the only one who did that. You might have done the same. But I suspect you didn't do what I did, which was to watch ***Star Trek: The Motion Picture***.

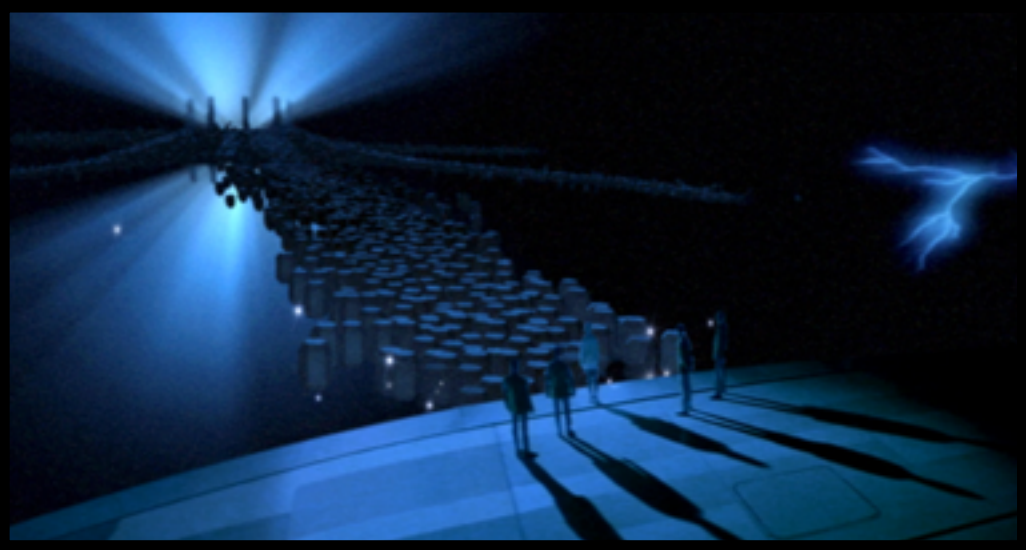
I've always had a soft spot in my heart for that movie. Maybe it's my chronic affection for the underdog. ***Star Trek: The Motion Picture*** has always gotten a bad rap. It was a critical disappointment. It's hardly a fan favourite. It's usually listed toward the bottom of lists of favourite *Star Trek* movies. It was a production disaster. Its $44 million budget gave Paramount execs heart attacks and led them to produce subsequent Trek movies on a shoestring (and with Gene Roddenberry kept as far away as possible).

A lot of the film's problems were self-inflicted. Its release date was set in stone: Paramount was worried that the public appetite for big-budget science fiction films like ***Star Wars*** and ***Close Encounters of the Third Kind*** was a passing fad, and saw its window of opportunity closing—which wreaked havoc on post-production. Special effects were unfinished, and the film just barely made its deadline.

The director, Robert Wise, later described what was released in the theatres as a rough cut. The movie wasn't really finished in his eyes—and in 2001, in what would be the final project of his thoroughly distinguished career (the man directed ***The Sound of Music***, for crying out loud), he released a Director's Edition that reflected what the film would have looked like if he and his crew had had the time to finish it properly. Though the effects were done on modern computer hardware, his team was careful to compose them in a way that would have been possible at the time.

The Director's Edition is a revelation, and not just for the visual effects. ***The Motion Picture*** has been given a nip and tuck throughout: a new edit, a new sound mix. Over-explicative bits of dialogue, cut. Droning spoken-word alerts, replaced by klaxons. Extra scenes for the TV version, all but gone. The Director's Edition shows rather than tells; it's meditative rather than talky. It's a better version, and you should check it out: you might be able to find it on DVD, and it's available for download on iTunes, but there's no HD version, probably because Wise and crew didn't composite it in HD.

But here's the thing. Yes, that $44-million bill—which, by the way, included the costs for the aborted ***Phase II*** series—was higher, adjusted for inflation, than any other Trek movie until the J. J. Abrams reboot. But its international box office was higher too. The fact is, ***Star Trek: The Motion Picture*** **made a metric crapton of money**. When we adjust box office receipts for inflation, we discover that **it grossed more than any subsequent *Trek* movie until *Star Trek Into Darkness*** (see the graph on page 35). And remember: ***Into Darkness*** was also released in 3D and IMAX, which have higher ticket prices.



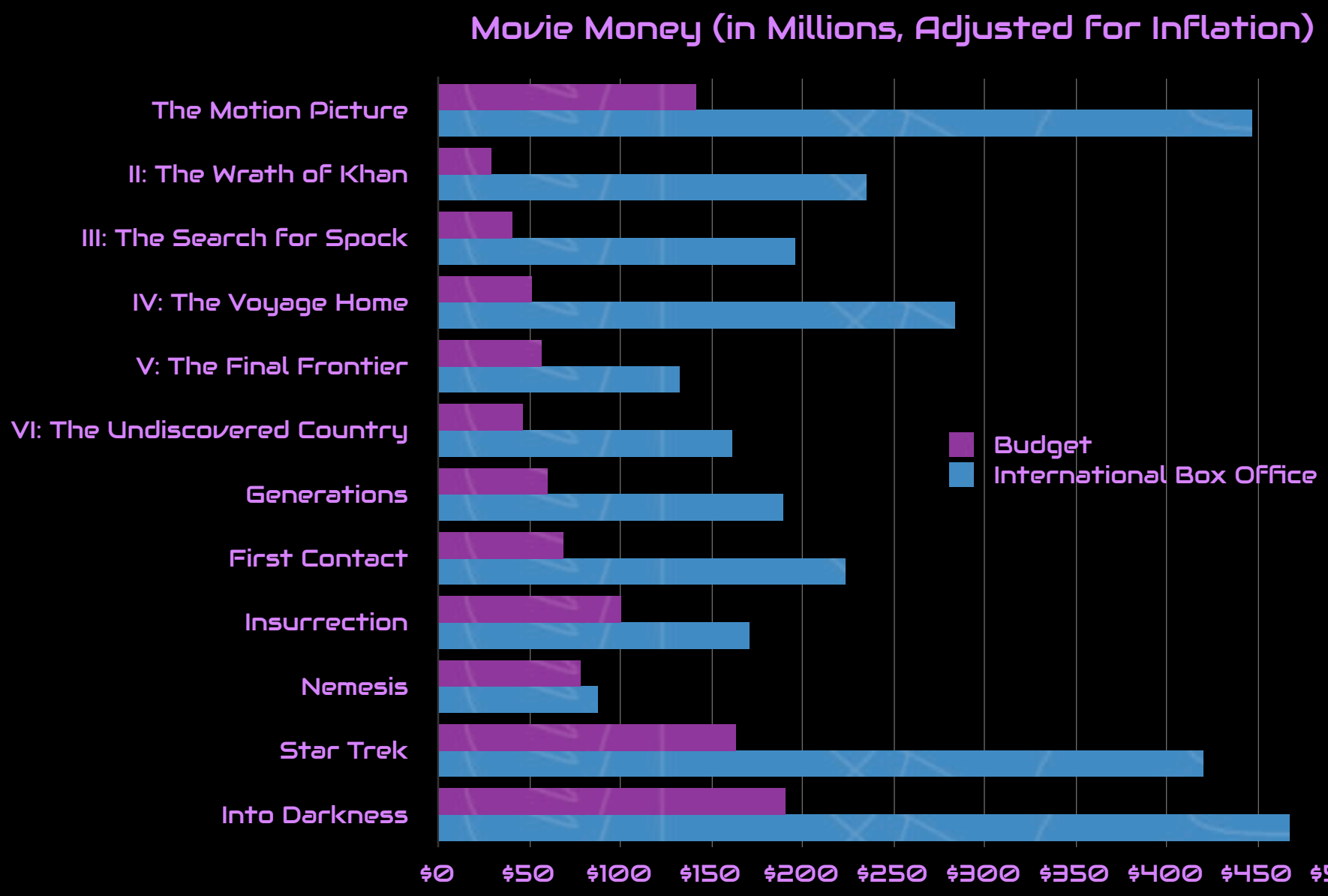
Theatrical Release

Director's Edition

(Sidebar: I hate box office as a metric. You can control for inflation, as I've done here by factoring in the CPI and converting old budgets and box office to present-day dollars, but ticket prices don't always follow the CPI. I suspect that the movie industry has its reasons for obfuscating ticket sales.)

After ***The Motion Picture*** and until the Abrams reboot, Trek movies were only modestly commercially successful, some (***The Wrath of Khan***, ***The Voyage Home***, ***First Contact***) more than others. They were successes only insofar as Paramount had very modest ambitions for them, and budgets to match. They were financially safe bets, with a guaranteed audience that would ensure a sufficient but not extravagant rate of return, so long as you kept costs low. ***The Wrath of Khan*** was produced through Paramount's TV unit, ***V*** and ***VI*** borrowed ***The Next Generation***'s sets, and the *Next Generation* movie credits are full of familiar names from the TV series' production crew. And to be quite honest, take away the additional production values and a lot of them, especially the *Next Generation* iterations, felt more like rather good two-part episodes than proper movies.

Which is to say that ***The Motion Picture***'s virtues, overlooked and unappreciated at the time, become more clear when you



compare the movie to its successors. And it's not just about the money.

First, **it has grandeur that the other *Trek* movies lack**. If it was slow, it was stately. Its pacing matched its scope: you don't get a proper sense of scale by rushing through (and with V'ger, scale is everything). ***The Motion Picture*** also represents a kind of filmmaking that went out with the 1970s, where movies for a mass-market audience didn't have to satisfy a toddler's attention span. Ever notice how slow ***The Godfather*** is? Or ***2001***?

Second, **it was the most plausible of the *Trek* movies**. Hard as it may be to believe, but an an artificial alien intelligence grown from the nut of a Voyager-class probe is among the most scientifically plausible premises we've seen from Trek on the big screen. (The Genesis effect is chemically illiterate gobbledygook; the *Next Generation* films tech the tech with the particle of the week a bit too much.)

But it's also more plausible on a human level. In ***The Motion Picture***, the crew has been reassembled for the first time. The junior officers have moved up one step in rank: Uhura and Sulu are lieutenant commanders, Chekov's a full lieutenant. Later films stretch credulity. Chekov becoming the *Reliant*'s first officer makes sense, but returning to the *En-*

terprise and staying there, along with everyone else, to the point where everyone's a captain or a commander and they're all doing the same damn job they were doing 25 years before—it strains credulity. In a real military organization, no crew would be kept together for decades: it's not good discipline. They would all have moved on. They would have had *careers*.

Reassembling them all for some good reason is a trick that's hard to repeat: you can only get the band back together so many times. (Notice the plot gymnastics required to get Worf onto the *Enterprise*-E after he transferred over to Deep Space 9. Three times in a row.) In ***The Motion Picture***, it's less implausible, because it's the first time. The crew are still relatively young (it's only been 10 years since the end of the series, and an unspecified amount of in-universe time) so the *Enterprise* doesn't look like the spaceborne retirement home it will become in ***The Undiscovered Country***.

And third, **it's the most *Trek*-like *Star Trek* movie ever made**. Almost every other *Trek* movie has something that ***The Motion Picture*** lacks: a villain.

But wait: Isn't V'ger the villain? No, not in the same sense: V'ger's an *antagonist*, but not a villain. It isn't Khan, or Commander Kruge, or General Chang. It isn't the Borg Queen or Shinzon.

No, V'ger's an antagonist of the sort we see in several classic *Star Trek* episodes: the alien whose intents and purposes are unknown; the goal of the crew of the *Enterprise*, whether they know it or not, is to discover what the alien wants. V'ger is in the tradition of Balok and the Horta, of "**The Corbomite Maneuver**" and "**Devil in the Dark**." The climax of the film occurs when the antagonist alien is *understood*—not destroyed.

This is *Star Trek* at its best.

The only other movie that treats its antagonist in the same way is ***The Voyage Home***—which, not surprisingly, is well thought of. But I'd argue that ***IV*** screws it up because the solution is figured out in the first act. The point of the movie is to get the cast into the present day; the probe is a McGuffin rather than a source of wonder.

Sure there's plenty of hugger-mugger fist-fighting, Shatner's-flying-dropkick action in the original series, but action sequences feel so out of place on the silver screen, particularly when non-Harrison Ford aging actors are tapped to perform them (Patrick Stewart never had so many physical scenes in the series as he did in the four *Next Generation* movies). It's like they're trying to be action movies, but until Abrams came along, they kind of sucked at it.

In comparison, ***The Motion Picture*** feels like pure product. Imperfect and incomplete on release, it still aspired to be something greater—something grander—than an overgrown TV show or an underweight, half-hearted action movie.

Worthy, carbon units, of another chance.

—Jonathan Crowe

On Young-Adult False Positives

SOME CONSTERNATION IN FEBRUARY when *Locus*'s recommended reading list counted Karl Schroeder's *Lockstep* (Tor, 2014) among the young-adult novels rather than the sf novels, which annoyed Jo Walton to no end.

Lockstep seems to be one of those edge cases that makes the divide between "adult" and "young adult" so difficult to determine. E. C. Myers, in his chapter in *The Complete Guide to Writing for Young Adults* (Dragon Moon, 2014), points to the rather circular definition that YA features young adults dealing with young adult concerns, but notes that the latter is just as important as the former. (He also notes that YA is primarily a marketing category, which I'll get to in a moment.)

Lockstep does have a young protagonist, and, as Paul Di Filippo notes in his review, uses less complex and opaque language. But that simply makes *Lockstep* entry-level, not necessarily YA. The same could be said for Greg Van Eekhout's *California Bones* (Tor, 2014), which I read last month: young protagonist, less complicated language.

A young protagonist is not enough, or else Gene Wolfe's *Fifth Head of Cerberus* (Scribner's, 1972) would be YA. Less complicated language is, I suspect, necessary but insufficient, but there's a range. Jennifer found Scott Westerfeld's *Afterworlds* (Simon Pulse, 2014) to be in the same reading-level ballpark as *Lockstep*, but Paolo Bacigalupi's *Doubt Factory* (Little, Brown, 2014) was easier. It's just that the same could be said for any two adult books—but you couldn't say that, for example, Greer Gilman's *Cloud and Ashes* (Small Beer, 2009) was somehow *more adult* than John Scalzi's *Old Man's War* (Tor, 2005).

It's not that teens don't read entry-level sf; when I was a teenager that's all there was for me to read. I didn't have the Heinlein, Le Guin or Norton juveniles; I read an awful lot of Asimov and Niven—and, erm, Piers Anthony. But in no way are they the same as the socially and emotionally relevant work being put out today. Suzanne Collins they ain't.

There's crossover work, to be sure, like the YA edition of Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* (Tor, 1985), to say nothing of all those adult works that covet a piece of the *very* lucrative YA market. Which reminds us that YA is a marketing category defined by who's doing the buying, not by who's the protagonist.

And certainly not by people who have only a passing familiarity with YA. (Like me.)

Books marketed as YA are *distinctive*. They generally come from separate young-adult imprints, are printed in larger type, are frequently illustrated, and cost significantly less than the equivalent adult trade book would have. If I had to determine whether a book was YA or not, I'd base my call on these more mundane factors.

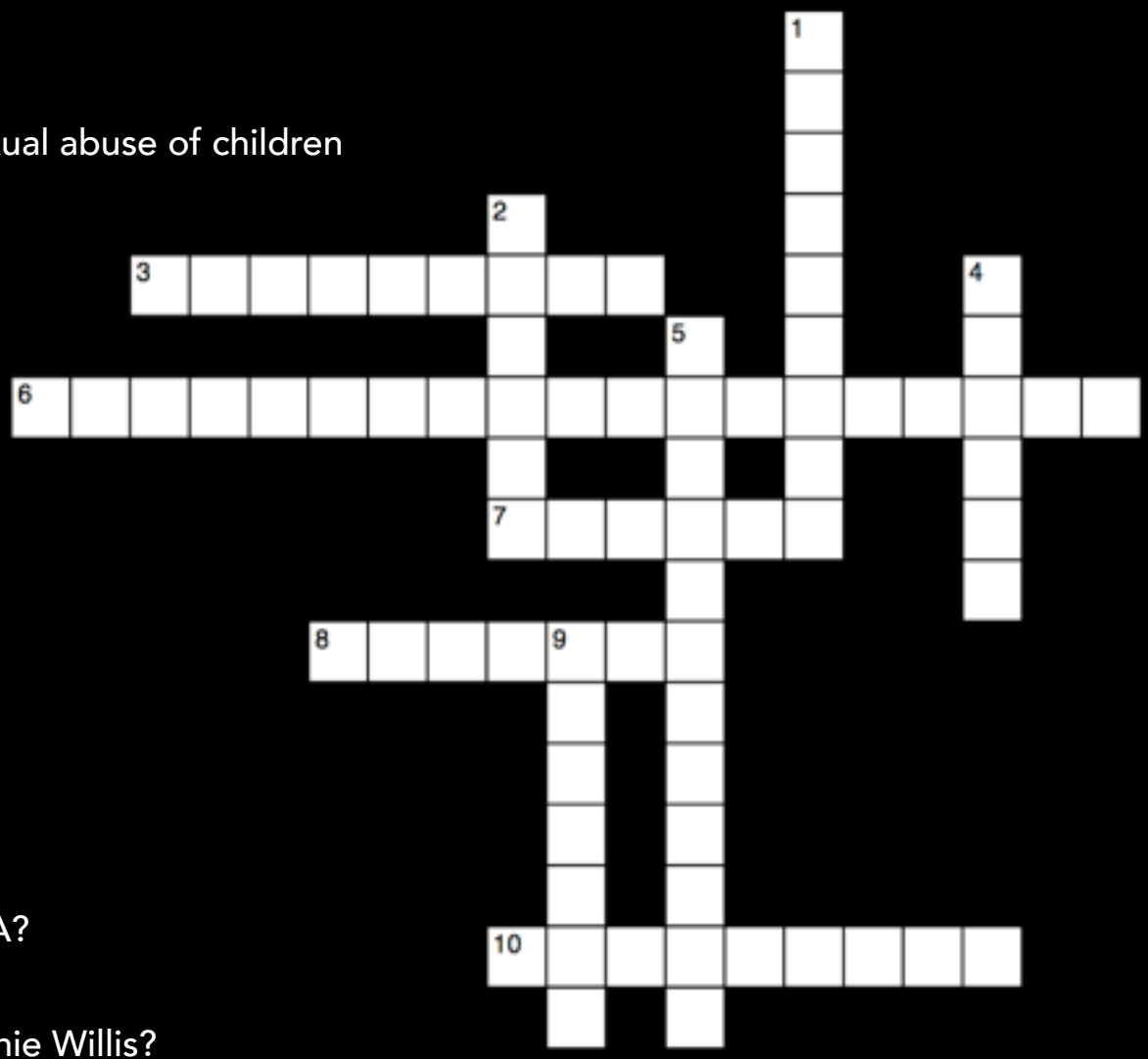
—Jonathan Crowe

CROSSWORD

Writers Are Horrible People

Across

3. This year's melancholy canine
6. Complicit in her husband's sexual abuse of children
7. Scalzi's hate-crush
8. Last year's melancholy canine
10. A racist statue won by POCs



Down

1. Do not engage
2. Convention pincher
4. He said WHAT about NAMBLA?
5. Requires only that you hate
9. He did WHAT onstage to Connie Willis?

Why waste your time reading great works of science fiction and fantasy when you can profitably spend it following the ugly behaviour and outrageous statements of your favourite writers? After all, if (1) writers are hurt into being and (2) hurt people hurt people, writers should provide no end of horribleness for us to enjoy. And, whether it's online or at a convention, so far they have not disappointed, giving us fresh drama with which to enjoy our popcorn instead of books we'll never read.

Begin your unhealthy parasocial relationship with writers you swear *you will never read again* with this handy and informative crossword puzzle. On the iPad it's interactive: tap the puzzle to begin. Or print the PDF and do it by hand, you old skool fan, you.

I've left lots of people out: this crossword was built with the free trial version of Puzzle Maker, which is limited to 10 entries. If you want to build a crossword covering the totality of our awfulness, the unlocked version costs $25.

Letters of Comment

MANY THANKS FOR ISSUE 4 of *Ecdysis*. Good to see it, good to read it, and we need all the Canadian fanzines we can get.

There's been a number of stories on the Hugo ballot in the past where a few people question a story's sf or fantasy content, but I don't recall seeing that kind of doubt in a blog. This may not be new, but seeing open doubt about a tale's lineage is new to me. There was a fuss over *Apollo 13* winning the best dramatic presentation Hugo, not a big fuss that I recall.

We made a short appearance at SFContario 5 just this past weekend, and while I can't comment on the con's content, the con suite was pretty good. . . . We spent most of last weekend at INSPIRE!, the Toronto International Book Fair, and it was an excellent time. We met up with Deborah Harkness and Lev Grossman to get some autographs.

We are hoping for Jennifer's speedy recovery, and hope this cancer nonsense will soon be just a bad memory. We've lost too many friends to cancer, and this must stop, now.

I've never even thought of Clarion for myself, and I am far too old to be considering it, but it's good to see that it's still going on, still training the next generation of SF writers, and people like the VanderMeers are teaching. As you detail here, it's not cheap; none of the workshops are cheap, but I guess you have to choose what you need and can afford should you want to learn how to be an sf writer.

My loc: Yvonne and I will be at Ad Astra 2015, and we hope you will be there, too. We will be there as steampunk vendors. The job hunt . . . the jobs we got for ourselves in June were replaced by new jobs in September, and we might be looking for more new jobs soon. You might find that people would say that this year's SFContario was also a little abandoned, a little slim in the attendance column. It was fun the short time we were there.

Time to get this to you . . . good health to everyone!, and get better soon, Jennifer. See you all with the next issue.

—Lloyd Penney

Jennifer finished cancer treatment in early November and got the all-clear in February; she's made of superhero-grade stuff, I tell you. She's very keen on going to Ad Astra, and we've registered, so I expect you'll see us there.

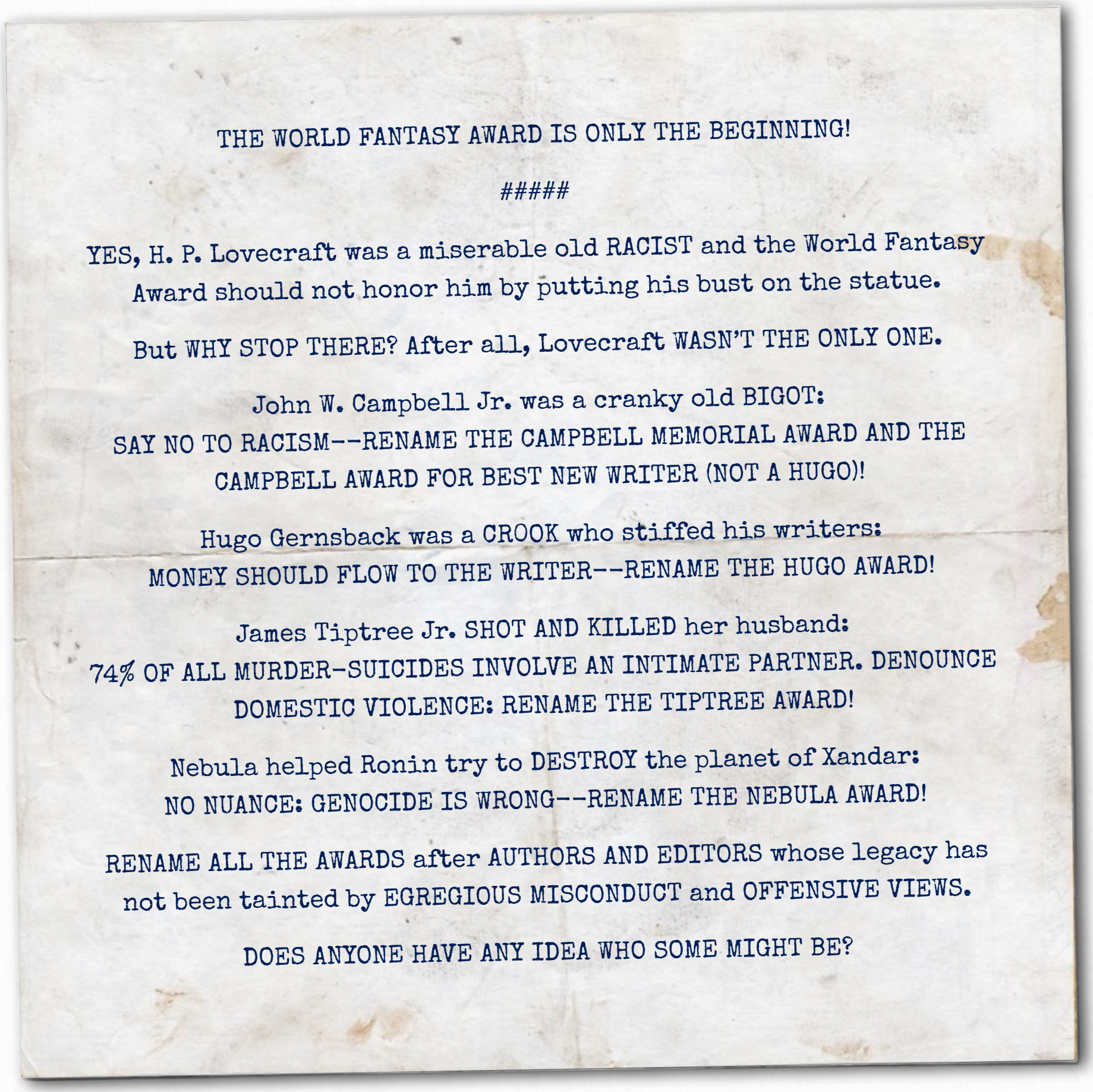
CONGRATULATIONS ON *ECDYSIS* 4, splendid work as ever!

Regarding your editorial "**But It's Not Science Fiction**," I share your instinctual distrust for genre boundary disputes as I have never seen that particular lines used as any-

thing but a means of arguing that some book shouldn't appear on an award short list.

Having said that, I am not yet willing to give up on the idea of genres as distinct entities and I do think that it saying a story is science fiction implies something different to saying that it is fantasy or horror.

I realise that there's something of a tension between these two positions and a lot of my recent thinking about genre and its history has revolved around trying to reconcile the two beliefs. My solution is to shift away from talking about the science fiction genre towards talking about certain traditions within



THE WORLD FANTASY AWARD IS ONLY THE BEGINNING!

#####

YES, H. P. Lovecraft was a miserable old RACIST and the World Fantasy Award should not honor him by putting his bust on the statue.

But WHY STOP THERE? After all, Lovecraft WASN'T THE ONLY ONE.

John W. Campbell Jr. was a cranky old BIGOT:
SAY NO TO RACISM--RENAME THE CAMPBELL MEMORIAL AWARD AND THE CAMPBELL AWARD FOR BEST NEW WRITER (NOT A HUGO)!

Hugo Gernsback was a CROOK who stiffed his writers:
MONEY SHOULD FLOW TO THE WRITER--RENAME THE HUGO AWARD!

James Tiptree Jr. SHOT AND KILLED her husband:
74% OF ALL MURDER-SUICIDES INVOLVE AN INTIMATE PARTNER. DENOUNCE DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: RENAME THE TIPTREE AWARD!

Nebula helped Ronin try to DESTROY the planet of Xandar:
NO NUANCE: GENOCIDE IS WRONG--RENAME THE NEBULA AWARD!

RENAME ALL THE AWARDS after AUTHORS AND EDITORS whose legacy has not been tainted by EGREGIOUS MISCONDUCT and OFFENSIVE VIEWS.

DOES ANYONE HAVE ANY IDEA WHO SOME MIGHT BE?

speculative fiction. For example, while I think that the New Wave shifted the goal posts, I don't think that their shift was necessarily towards a "better" or "more sophisticated" form of writing . . . post-New Wave SF is different to the pre-New Wave SF that appeared in the pulps but that doesn't mean that the aesthetic goalposts used by pre-New Wave writers were inherently less interesting or worthwhile.

I read stories like "Wakulla Springs" and "If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love" and conclude that I am simply not interested in stories that come from that particular literary tradition. I don't think there's any argument you can deploy to say that genre magazines shouldn't carry those types of stories but I feel comfortable saying not only that I do not like those stories but also that I am not interested in reading any more stories from their respective traditions. I see what they're doing technically and I see that they do have a certain genre pedigree that makes them a reasonable fit for genre publications but I am comfortable ignoring that type of output as it is not what brought me to genre fiction in the first place.

In the age of Buzzfeed, many people write about literature in terms of "10 Books You MUST Read" or "Why Adults SHOULD Read YA" but I don't recognise the implied moral force behind those statements. Humanity has yet to produce a single book that anyone is morally obligated to read, there is no compulsion to read anything beyond the need to do what you enjoy doing. I washed up on the shores of genre as a result of reading Stephen Baxter and Greg Egan and I'm not clear why a fondness for those types of stories should incline me to read "If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love."

I wonder whether the "but it's not science fiction" argument might not be a result of genre culture's weird tendency to expect people to have read or at least be aware of most things. "But it's not science fiction" is a damn good excuse for not having read award-nominated stories but "I'm not interested in that type of thing" is a pretty damn good one too. I would like to see genre culture encourage people to be honest about the latter but the former definitely needs to disappear from the discourse.

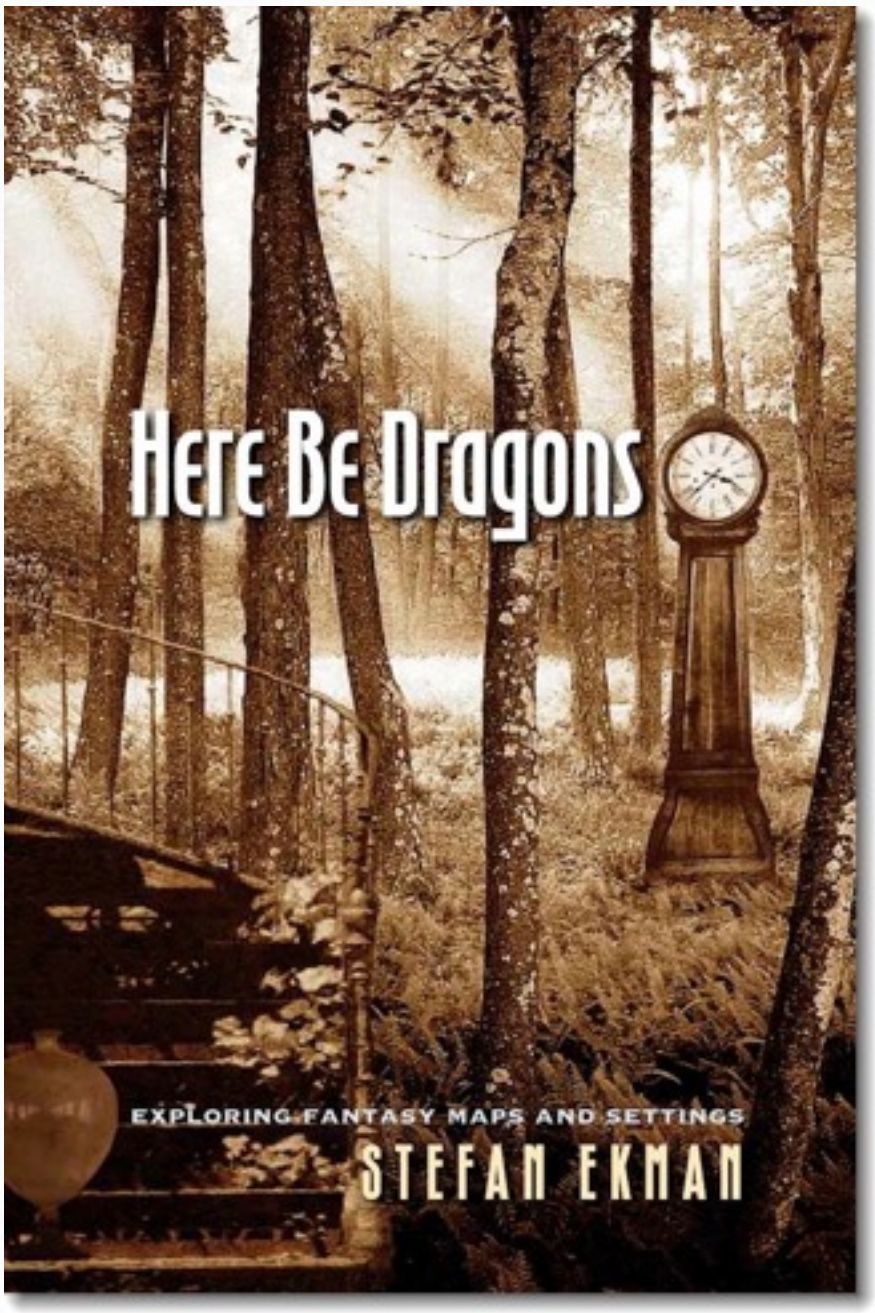
—Jonathan McCalmont

Last October, at an editing workshop at CanCon, David Hartwell argued that the early 1970s was the last time people were able to keep up with the entire sf field. Since then, there's simply been too much published for any single person to stay on top of. What's happening here is, I think, related. People are trying to stay on top of the field by reducing it in scope: defining the field down to the subset of science fiction that they like and that drew them to the field and dismissing the rest as outdated, bad or not really science fiction. Of course everyone has a different subset!

Send letters to ecdysis@mcwetboy.net.

NONFICTION FOR SF/FANTASY READERS:

Stefan Ekman's *Here Be Dragons*



Stefan Ekman's *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings* (Wesleyan University Press, 2013) uses statistics to talk about fantasy maps.

Let me explain how that works.

This book discusses the role of place in fantasy. Only one of its four chapters deals with maps (the remaining three deal with the issue of borders and territories, the relationship between nature and culture in fantasy cities, and the relationship between ruler and realm), but that chapter represents the first serious step toward a proper understanding of fantasy maps—which, as you know, are very relevant to my interests. Among other things, Ekman looks at the state of maps published in fantasy novels. What do they look like?

Here's where the statistics come in.

Ekman took a random sample of two hundred fantasy novels and counted not only how many of them have maps (answer: about one-third), but how frequently certain map features and elements turn up on those maps (for example, compass roses, whether north is at the top, which natural and artificial features are shown). Mountains, which I consider the quintessential fantasy map feature, are invariably shown in profile or oblique rather than contour or shaded relief.

"Like much high fantasy, the secondary-world maps follow a pseudomedieval aesthetic according to which dashes of pre-Enlightenment mapping conventions are rather routinely added to a mostly modern creation," Ekman argues (p. 66). We know intuitively that fantasy maps have a certain look, a shared design language—Ekman gives us the data to back it up.

—Jonathan Crowe