

Chris Garcia's

DRINK TANK

H.G. WELLS

THINGS
TO

COME

Cover by Mo Starkey! She's awesome, I've said it before, I'll say it again!

Cinequest is coming up on me. It's insane around here, and there's the SF Outreach Project which I've been collecting books to give out at the upcoming Wondercon. We'll be giving out thousands of books. They are currently stacked up in front of my closet. There are 30 or so boxes these, all chockablock full of books. It's cluttered and there's no space (my place is tiny) and it's slightly maddening! Still, It's a good thing that we're doing and I'm happy to be a part of it.

I'm going to be doing the Theatre Announcing for Plan 9 From Outer Space world premiere in 3D! Now, of all the films that needed to be 3Ded, Plan 9 is not one that I'd complain about being messed with. There is actually some value in taking terrible films, and let me say that Plan 9 is awful though not without some charm, and makign them the ones that show off the technological advancements of recent years. Much better to fiddle with films like Plan 9, The Milpitas Monster, Robot Monster or Night of the Lepis than to try and make classics like Forbidden Planet,

The Day The Earth Stood Still or Destination Moon (all of which have been discussed) into gaudy, depth-filled spectacles. There are gonna be 3D films, and it's best to have them be lesser films. On the other hand, colorization has been a piece of controversy over the years, but... well, we'll talk about that later.

We're looking at Things to Come

this week, followed by some My Little Fun from our good friend Taral Wayne.

And I'm workign on the TAFF issue, and you should be VOTING!!! I'm 100% behind John Coxon, he's a stud who would make Renovation awesome, but you can't go wrong with any of them!





52 Weeks to Science Fiction Film Literacy Things to Come (1936)

Some things are best left unfilmed. Many of the works of H.G. Wells fit that description. Yes, there have been good translations of *The Time Machine* to movies, but there have also been terrible, terrible, terrible adaptations. *The Shape of Things to Come* is one of his better novels, the one where it is obvious that he was one of the greatest far-seers of the day, but reading it, I didn't think that it was one of those that'd easily lend itself to film.

I was pleasantly surprised when I sat down and re-watched it for the first time since college.

Let's start with H.G. Wells. The man understood the world in a way that very few people do. He conceived of a World that was Modern. He was the one who saw further than just about anyone of

the day. At the time there were a lot of far-seers, including a guy named Verne. Verne HATED Wells' stuff. Wells wrote *The Shape of Things to Come* in 1932 or so, publishing it in 1933. He looked forward more than a hundred years, playing out one thing after another following a devastating Second World War that drags on and on. This came to me when I was reading Cherie Priest's *Clockwork Century* novels that the idea was similar. The Second World War that Wells saw went on for almost 20 years, much like Priest's Civil War.

The story shows how humanity rebuilds, evolves into a benevolent dictatorship and then into a new world that is hella Utopian. It's the kind of thing you'd expect from a guy who was ultimately Platonic in his thinking.

Things to Come takes place starting in 1940. That was just 4 years in the future when the film opens. The screenplay was written by Wells himself and the film was directed by a Mr. William Cameron Menzies who also did the art direction for films like *The Thief of Bagdad* while directing flicks like *The Maze* and *Invaders from Mars*. He was one of the truly visionary filmmakers of the 1920s and 30s. I'd say that *Things to Come* was certainly his peak as a director.

The film shows several things that are very important when considering the power of an adaptation. First is how much can a writer be involved in the creation of a film based on his own works. Wells was certainly involved, he wrote the script, but the book is much different than his screenplay. Well, maybe dif-

ferent isn't the right word. It's different, though the themes are still there, the way that Wells approached the concepts was the same. The one thing that is so clear is that Wells' script wasn't the complete story that was told in the film. There are many cooks who get their fingers in the pie that is the film. The director has his vision of the script as it will come to the screen, the cinematographer has his vision of what it should look like and then the editor has his finger on the button that chooses what goes where and how. Wells had nothing to do with the final product, but even though that's true, you can still feel Wells on it.

One of the interesting things is the recent DVD release from Legend Films. They undertook a comprehensive colorization process to make it accessible to a contemporary audience. This concept started back about 1900, when folks would regularly hand-tint the films they made. This was because folks were no longer thrilled just get moving images on a screen. The jaded audiences needed color! There was a movement to do color pictures in the 1920s, using a two-strip Technicolor process, though very few films would do a complete color film, instead choosing to highlight certain scenes with color. In the 1980s and 90s, Ted Turner's people started colorizing many of the films in the MGM and RKO libraries that Turner had purchased. The initial results were bad, looked terrible and were just bad. Topper was prob-



ably the worst of them. As time went by, the processes got better, and I saw Turner's color version of Casablanca that looked amazing. My all-time favorite quote about it was from Orson Welles: "Keep Ted Turner and his goddamned Crayolas away from my movie." When it came out that Turner wanted to do a colored version of Citizen Kane.

Legend Films wanted to rerelease a number of 1930s, 40s and 50s films, colorizing many of them, including Things to Come. They consulted with Ray Harryhausen, just about the perfect person to ask about such matters, to see if they

could colorize his films. He suggested that they go with Things to Come and a few others. Harryhausen claims, and I'd be very surprised if it weren't true, that Menzies and various other producers and directors of the 1930s, would have loved to have made their films in color, but couldn't afford it. He consulted and they used very modern colorization techniques. This resulted in a film that looks very authentic. Having watched a lot of 1930s color films, this has the feeling of those films. What I really appreciate is that they included both the colorized version and the black-and-white versions of the film.

If you watch a lot of old color movies, particularly those from the UK and France in the period from 1935 to 1955 or so, you'll see the slightly washed-out imagery which looks good and has a sort of sfumato quality to the color that is quite engaging. They've managed to capture that in the DVD release, and at times I forgot I was watching a colorized version. That's the best compliment you can give a colorized film.

The sad thing is they don't include any of the longer versions that exist. There is a VHS release that's about 7 minutes longer, and a DVD version that is two or three. No idea why they didn't release it that way, but it might have to do with the film version they acquired to make the DVD. Still, the story hangs together and it feels very honest, even the colored version.

There is so much more here to talk about. The concept of a 'Future History' wasn't new when Wells did it, though it might have been the first film to do so. I can't think of an earlier future history film personally, and it was certainly an influential film. Watching it while reading Stephen Baxter's *Evolution*, I can see the techniques that Baxter must have read in the book. It's probably true that Baxter is the most recent heir to the Wells world.

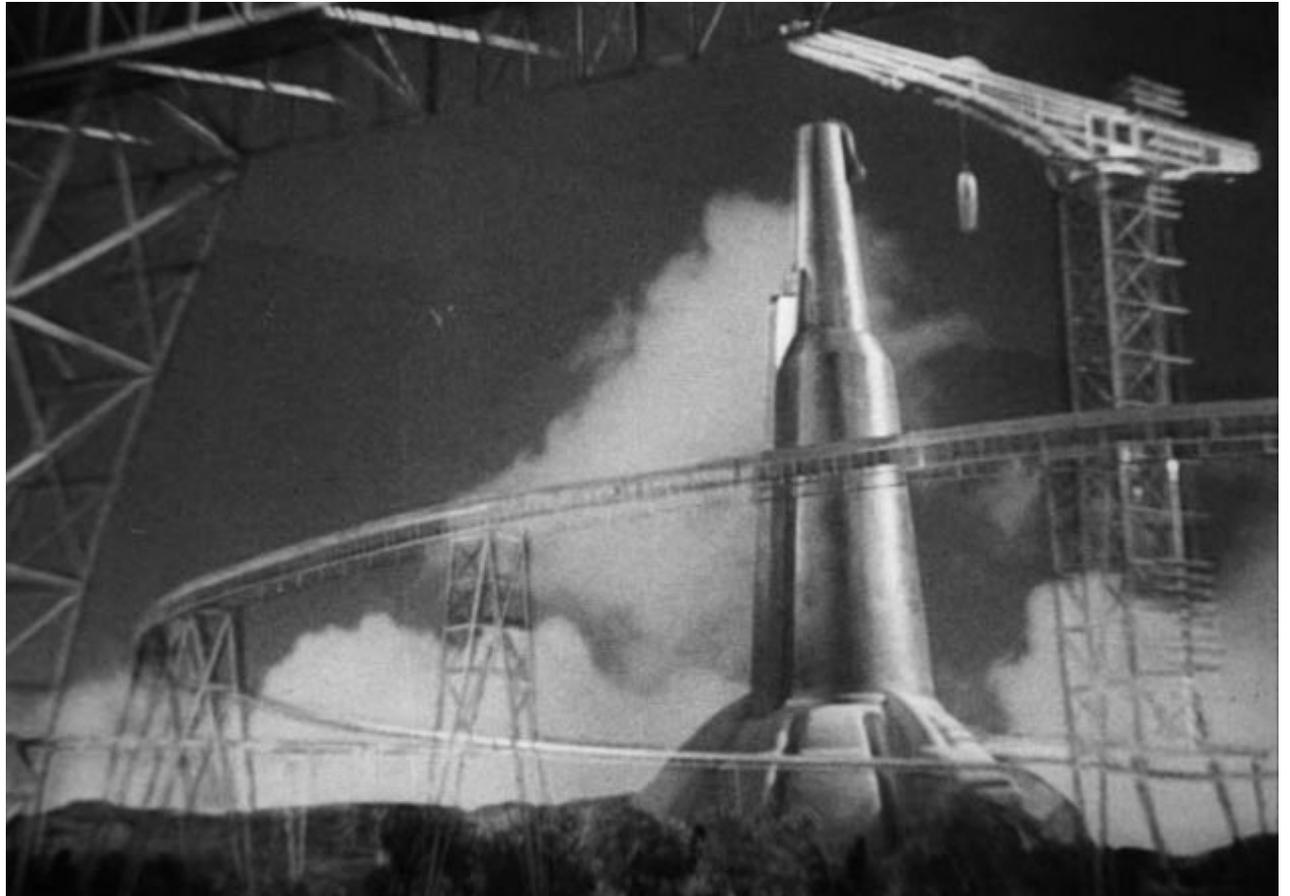
The real deal here is the art direction. Influential and remarkable, when you hire an art director as your director, well, it's gonna play a major part. Watching the film, you can see so many tie-ins to later SF. It was hugely influential on so many people, including being the favorite film of Fory Ackerman and an influential film on folks like Ray Bradbury and, of course, Harryhausen. It was one of the films that majorly influenced everyone and you can see bits of the films that were to come. The sets are remarkable, the cinematography not overly tricky, which allows the sets and costumes to play strong and not be up-staged. There are significant portions of the film that are shot tableau, with a stationary camera as the action plays out in various parts of the frame. It's a great concept. There are a couple of great Matte paintings, which is an art that has died since the invention of the blue-screen.

Yes, to a modern viewer the dia-

logue will seem stilted and the presentation a bit primitive, but it was so far ahead of anything else that it still has a sway. Watch *Metropolis* again and you'll see that this is another path. Where *Metropolis* went big and modernist, *Things to Come* was almost post-modernist. The story travels through stages of human development and shows us what a logical, humane evolution of human society should look like. The future is perfect, clean, real, true. The early future is brutish, rough, misunderstanding. The path to the future is the hard one and

it's what Wells excels at showing us.

Things to Come is probably the most influential film of the 1930s when it comes to science fiction storytelling. While *Flash Gordon* was more important in the look and feel of SF film, *Things to Come* is a map to how one can bring about a story in an SF mode. It really plays the story well and is certainly the best example of Wells' oeuvre on film. I can not recommend it more, as it is a film that is a must to really understand what it is that Science Fiction film can do at it's best.



Back in issue 270, I told a little lie. I said that director Fritz Lang's "Metropolis" was the first movie I ever bought. That's only partially true. I bought screenwriter H.G. Wells' "Things to Come" the same day. This was a deliberate choice, as the two films are thematically connected.

Both are black and white epics starring huge, Art Deco machines and buildings. Both tell the story of a futuristic city populated not by people but by human-shaped stand-ins spouting the authors' philosophical viewpoints. (The characters are even flatter in the shortened version of "Metropolis.")

At their cores, though, these films are startlingly different, even diametrically opposed. H.G. Wells wrote a scathing review of "Metropolis" – this document outlines all the changes he'd make in creating "Things to Come" a decade later. [You can read the review, published in the April 17, 1927, New York Times, here: [http://erkelzaar.tsudao.com/reviews/H.G.Wells_on_Metropolis%201927.htm] Wells said "Metropolis" "gives in one edifying concentration almost every possible foolishness, cliché, platitude, and muddlement about mechanical progress and progress in general served up with a sauce of sentimentality that is all its own."

Some of Wells' points are petty, but interesting to those who love the



Science: Wonder of Terror? by Frank Wu

nuts and bolts of science. For instance, even in the 1920's, urban planners knew it was nonsensical to build tall vertical structures, as in Metropolis, where the gardens of the rich are directly above the grimy machinery that powers them, the workers' slums further below. The physical weight and pressures would be prohibitive. Even by 1900, industrial areas were being placed on cheap land far from the city centers. But Lang arranged his city for philosophical and symbolic reasons, so I'll let this slide.

Wells also notes – and this bothered me, too – that despite a century of advancement, they're still flying bi-planes in Metropolis! Bi-planes! Wells' vision – apparently enriched by the teardrop designs of Bel Geddes and the fantastic

contraptions of "Air Wonder Stories" – presents a parade of unusual planes. We see a tail-less one-seater stabilized by swept wings with huge wingtip fences – essentially a one-man flying wing that presages the Beechcraft Starship by four decades. We also get to see huge bombers with twin hulls – presaging the TIE bombers – which launch scores of paratroopers – presaging the first use of such troopers in WWII. There is also the elegant Gyro Copter (Wells noticed that there are no helicopters in "Metropolis"). This is such a beautiful Art Deco design – with both vertical and horizontal propellers – that

a garage model kit is now available: [http://www.monstersinmotion.com/cart/sci-fi-as-in-science-fiction-item-listt-c-9_188/things-to-come-gyro-copter-1-48-scale-model-kit-p-7645?zenid=qk20rmebl15fksbk8fne0dq971]

Wells' biggest quibble, though, is the relationship between man and machine in "Metropolis." All the workers in "Metropolis" are drudges, who literally grease the wheels of industry with their own blood. But the machines are ill-designed. The poor schmuck tending the famous clock machine could be easily replaced by a simple light sensor and gear system. Wells sums up that "a mechanical civilization has no use for mere drudges; the more efficient its machinery the less need there is for the quasi-me-



settings designer Vincent Korda, and special effects director and model builder Ned Mann – all of whom proved their visual panache in other productions. But the overall concept is Wells', and he had specifically wrote of problems with "Metropolis" (e.g., machines that twirl and spin but don't actually make anything) that are corrected in "Things to Come."]

Wells rails against the very idea of human slaves tending the Metropolitan machines: "A vast, penni-

chancial minder. It is the inefficient factory that needs slaves; the ill-organized mine that kills men." Again, though, I'd emphasize that Lang makes his men into slaves for symbolic and philosophical reasons, not logical and technical reasons. In contrast, the workers in Wells' Everytown are skilled or, at least, semi-skilled. They aren't anonymous man-masses, but work in small teams on the mining machines, or else work alone tooling around in cool Art Deco trucks or overseeing huge vats and pistons in snazzy Art Deco helmets and uniforms (none of the workers in Metropolis is given protective clothing). [Credit should also be given to director William Cameron Menzies, producer Alexander Korda,

less slave population may be necessary for wealth where there are no mass production machines, but it is preposterous with mass production machines. ... 'Efficiency' means large-scale productions, machinery as fully developed as possible, and high wages." Indeed, in Wells' Everytown of the year 2036, there are no slaves. Even the future Luddites have to admit that life is pretty good. There is no war, no one is hungry, the arts are promoted, and (as shown in a deleted scene) even diseases like the common cold are eradicated. All thanks to science.

And herein lies the key difference between "Things to Come" and "Metropolis."

In "Things to Come", science is our friend. It's our enemy in "Metropolis" – and just about every other great science fiction film ever made.

My love and respect for this film stems not just from the awesome design work, but from the notion that this film – presaging John F. Kennedy's famous inaugural address – alone invokes the wonders of science, rather than its terrors.

Let's compare "Things to Come" to a sample list of the best SF films of all time – from ign.com [http://movies.ign.com/articles/677/677739p5.html]

This list is headed by:

1. Bladerunner
2. 2001: A Space Odyssey
3. Star Wars
4. Alien
5. The Empire Strikes Back
6. The Planet of the Apes
7. The Matrix
8. The Day the Earth Stood Still
9. The Road Warrior
10. Terminator 2

All of these films are arguably anti-science. In several, science has created evil quasi-humans or insane computers or programs that hunt down real humans. Or science threatens our world – and others – with nuclear annihilation. Space travel isn't a cosmic jaunt, but a terrifying hellride to worlds where hu-

manity is subjugated, humiliated and/or tortured and killed by hideous life forms.

Consider other great genre movies. "Forbidden Planet" shows us a technology that creates monsters from the Id, that destroy the civilization that created them. The best of all the original "Star Trek" films, the second one, shows us a horrifying device that can wipe out an entire planet's ecosystem within minutes.

The worst offender of the lot, though, is the beloved "Star Wars." For all its myriad charms – which I love dearly – "Star Wars" is not a science fiction film. It is an anti-science film. It ceases to be a science fiction film the moment that Luke Skywalker turns off his targeting computer and relies on an ancient, mystical, intangible Force.

"Things to Come" is unabashedly pro-science. The Everytown of "Things to Come" isn't a technical nightmare. No, the technocrats pursue "an active and aggressive peace." They "direct their energies to tear out the wealth of the planet... and exploit these giant possibilities of science that have been squandered hitherto upon war and senseless competition." In the symbolic consummation, humanity launches the first spaceship

to journey around the moon, fired by a huge space gun.

Now, I love a scary monster as much as anyone. Particularly if it's giant. Especially if it's discovered or engendered by use of a fantastic vehicle taking us to strange lands, or atomic tomfoolery, toxic chemicals or misguided biotechnology.

But... what I'd love to see is more science fiction that actually appreciates science instead of fearing it. Instead of seeing that lasers that destroy spaceships and planets and, to paraphrase Professor Fink, only have evil applications, why can't we have more stories about lasers

used in manufacturing, mining, blood clot removal, and eye and dental surgery?

What I'd love to see is science used as JFK envisioned it, to "explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths, and encourage the arts and commerce."

That's the future world "Things to Come" envisions.



We all take it for granted that we'll live in the future someday. Maybe we aren't living there now, but in a year, or ten years, or twenty-five, we will.

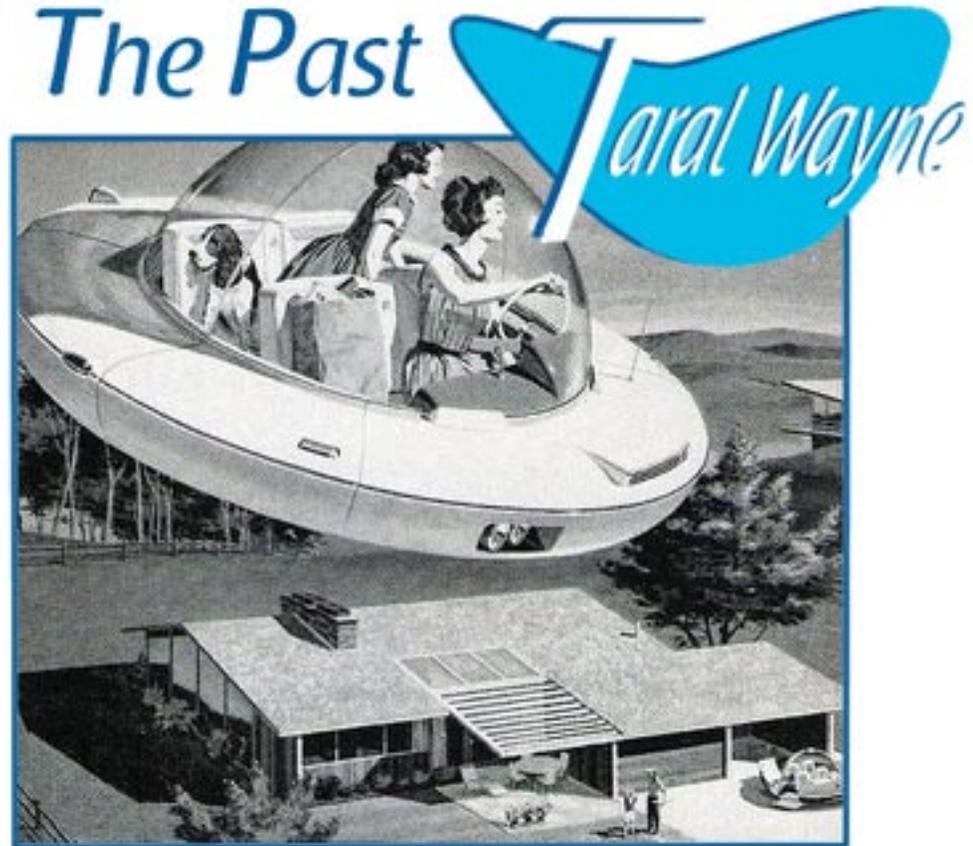
For the longest time, it looked as if we were going to make it, too. One day, it would be the future, and all we had to do was wait! But... apparently the passage of time has not taken a straight line forward. It has doubled back on us. While we were staring through the big picture window at our bright future, a small crack appeared in the glass that we didn't notice. We didn't realize that the future was actually slowing down.

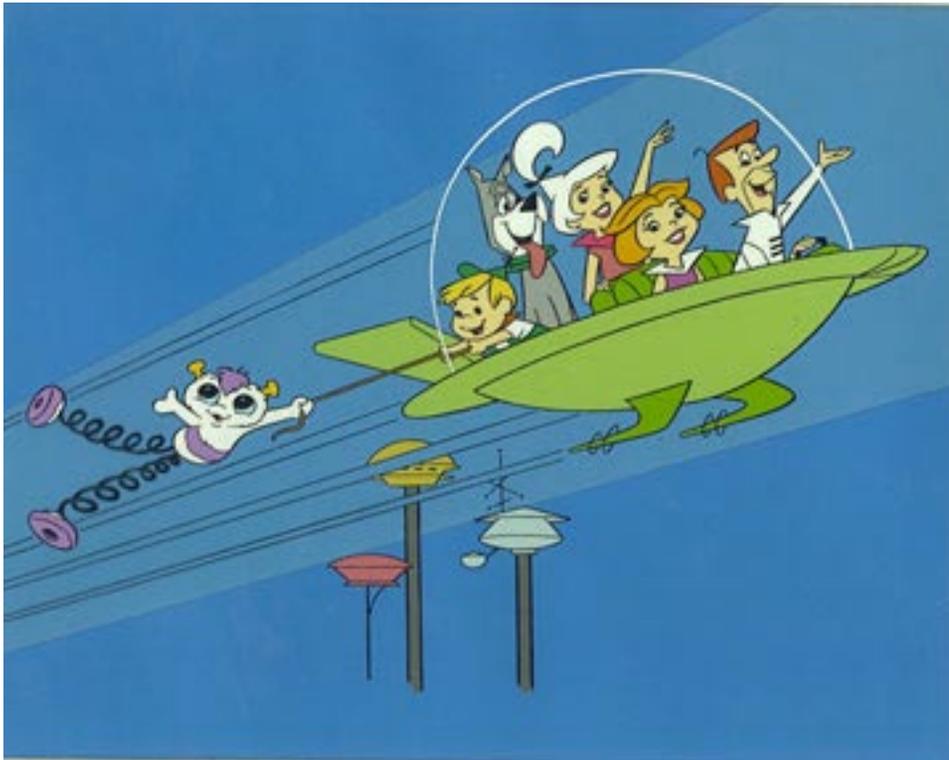
Here we are, in the 21st century. Technically, we made it. It's the future. Some of what we looked forward to arrived on schedule, but where's the rest?

Do you remember the Boeing 2707? No, it wasn't a wide-bodied, or a long-bodied, or a Short Take-Off-and-Landing urban people-mover. It was the American Super Sonic Transport. Picture the Concorde, but without bilingual signs in the washrooms and no escargot on the menu.

The first studies for the Boeing SST began in 1960, leading to a definitive design by 1964. Boeing felt that the first flight might be made in 1970, and certification for commercial use follow in 1974. The nose of the SST would droop for take-offs and landings, just as it did for the Concorde. But the SST's design included variable-geometry wings. After take-off, the long, narrow main wing

The Future From The Past





boom path 50 miles wide, and the noise would disturb cows and brain surgeons at work. It would alter the vibes, man! One state after another banned supersonic flight over their turf, until there was nowhere in US airspace where the SST could stretch its wings. There was no suddenly no point to continuing with development. Congress ended funding in 1971, and Boeing quietly

would swing back, forming a delta configuration with the rear stabilizers. Later, Boeing added a pair of canards just behind the control cabin. Whisking people halfway around the world at Mach 2, the Boeing 2707 was the logical next step in the jet age.

Boeing was so certain of further development that there was a model kit issued by Revell in 1/144 scale.

But the Boeing 2707 wasn't to be.

The cranks waded in. They insisted that the SST would deplete the ozone in the atmosphere. They said water vapor from the jets would envelop the Earth with a layer of impenetrable cloud. They swore it would create a sonic

shelved the project.

Meanwhile, the Europeans completed and flew the Concorde – without perceptibly disturbing cattle or brain surgeons – and dominated the Transatlantic route for the next 30 years. The Concorde did not fly over the USA, however. No, no, no! For most of us, the air was closed to the future.

Looking back on events, it appears to me that this was America's first fully committed step backwards.

Not long after, the remaining Moon flights in the Apollo program were scrapped. There was much we hadn't learned about the Moon, but the Russians looked bad, and wasn't that the

only real point for most Americans, who thought the money better spend on golf lessons? Nixon had taken all the credit for Kennedy's project by then, so he was good with calling it quits.

Then there was the Yom Kippur war. We backed Israel and, in response, OPEC embargoed oil shipments to The West. The cost of gasoline shot up. Suddenly, two-ton land yachts powered by a 429 cu. in. engine and separate air conditioners in front and rear seats didn't seem like such a good idea. But even after OPEC blinked and the cost of gas fell, the environmentalists struck again. Legislation forced Detroit to cut exhaust emissions and improve passenger safety, beginning an era of underpowered Fox Frame and K-car shit-boxes with rubber-baby-buggy-bumpers that nobody enjoyed driving. Not even Ralph Nader. (They even took the pony badge off the Ford Mustang, for heaven's sake!)

Nuclear power was next on the list of 20th century developments that were to be written off. Despite an overall good safety record, a little steam escaped from Three Mile Island. With visions of two-headed babies and overcrowded cancer-wards, the public's panic grew. What if the air caught fire? What if the reactor core melted down and bored a hole all the way to China? The public stepped up the pace of its march back to 1900... burning a little Darwin along the way.

And now the US can no longer

even send men into space. There were half-hearted attempts to design a replacement for the Space Shuttle, but deep in our hearts we knew that there was going to be none. The lifting bodies and Delta Clippers made the news for a day – to lull us into complacency – and then the funds were quietly cut. Easier to thumb a ride from the Russians, who – strange to say – seem entirely over their embarrassment at losing the race to the Moon.

Hell, our about-face has even affected Star Trek! Star Trek! What was once a glimpse of the wonderful future ahead for us all stopped looking forward.

In 1966, Star Trek was all about a better future. So long as Roddenberry was alive, it remained so. But as soon as he was dead, the franchise took a turn for the “dark.”

That brought a certain benefit, to be sure. Seeing a little of the Dark Side of Star Fleet and the Federation only made the utopian 24th century seem more believable. Unfortunately, the 25th century was where it seems no man is going to go. There were two more series after Deep Space 9. One of them threw away almost the entire franchise, allowing Gene's step-children to demonstrate that they didn't have any grasp on the show's original message to the viewer

as.

The last series went even farther, retreating two centuries into the past... practically into our present. Predictably, it was the worst series of the lot... so much so that the final episode of “Enterprise” revealed the whole thing to be a holo-



deck game played on Deep Space 9.

Apart from a handful of episodes showing us dubious possible futures, we will never find out if Star Fleet will ever launch an Enterprise 1701-Z.

Worse, now none of what will have happened will happen at all. The re-launch of the series on the Big Screen has gone back to the days of cadet Kirk, and wiped out everything that had previously followed. Pretty much an entire century of the future, gone!

How much future do we have

left? We must be running out of it perilously fast. It was bad enough in the 1980s, when we began to suspect the future was going to be nasty, brutish, and digital. Now we may face a future where the planet is ten degrees hotter, the tropics unlivable, agriculture failing, and humanity on the brink of extinction. All because we couldn't see a little way into the future to notice that CO2 levels were rising...

I don't know about you, but I could use a future that I would want to live in again – no more dystopia, cyberspace or steampunk. Gimme my goddamn Jetson flying car and a 3D TV from Futurama! I turn my back on the future-we-have, for a better future from the past.