

**THE DAY THE EARTH CAUGHT**

**FIRE**

A woman with wet, dark, curly hair and glistening skin is the central focus. She is looking directly at the camera with a serious, intense expression. Her hair is damp and clings to her head. The background is a bright, fiery orange and yellow, suggesting a fire or a very hot environment. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the contours of her face and the texture of her hair.

**DRINK TANK**

Welcome to another Drink Tank and the return to the 52 Weeks to Science Fiction Film Literacy program! I'm always happy to be back at my work and I really loved the movie that I'll be talking about. I was working on the Hugo for Best Novel issue (which I really liked!) and then on Westercon and other stuff.

Oh Yeah, Westercon. Let me start by saying AWESOME! It was a really good time, even though I wasn't staying at the hotel and had to trek in and out most nights. It was still a great time, especially running the fanzine lounge. I brought a ton of the zine collections and Mo Starkey (who did this issue's cover) brought a bunch of her art and I was so happy to get to show it off. We had a lot of great conversation (including one with Leigh Ann, Espana and Unwoman that was endlessly awesome) and I had had the aforementioned Unwoman playing in the Lounge on Saturday. She was so good, even playing in front of about 20 people, she puts on a helluva show. I've seen her playing in front of hundreds of people and in front of a dozen and she always puts out the big effort.

You might remember that I had a lovely moment at the last Westercon I made it to, the one in Vegas, where Bill Mills played Rocket Man for me in a rotunda with only Roxanne Mills along for the ride. This time, it was Unwoman playing piano and singing for me and two or three others. She played a song from V For Vendetta that just blew me away. She was great and an absolute highlight for me for Westercon 64.

The big news for many was what I called the SMOFocalypse!!!! It all started with Kevin and Andy starting a hoax bid to bring Westercon 66 in 2013 to a roadside place called Granzella's.

I've been there and I posted a lot of comedy stuff, but after a bit, they started taking the bid as a more serious protest bid, which got a lot of traction, especially from folks who would not normally vote. The Portland bid, which had been the only pre-announced bid and the only one theoretically eligible to win, had done very little, had been hit with life and couldn't cope with it. That led to a vote that saw it end up with Granzella's with 42 votes and Portland 41. A Hoax bid had won, possibly for the first time (The legendary 'Both' vote may have got the most votes, but we'll never know) and that sent it to the Business Meeting, which went on for three hours and was an amazing amount of work. Kevin Standlee did an amazing job keeping it going and in the end, it turned up with Kevin and Andy getting Westercon 66. They're looking at a place in the Sacramento Valley. I hope I'll get a chance to be on their committee, and I am certainly going to be going!

Glenn Glazer is a stud. He put on a great Westercon, one that was slightly rattling around in the Fairmont, which was a great hotel, and he put together a team that put on a good con for the fans to make the most of. We had Match Game SF, which was fun as always, and we had the Foglios doing Girl Genius Radio Theatre,

which I enjoyed, and a ton of Filk and other concerts. Westercon brought us Milt Stevens and John Hertz and the three of us had a wonderful conversation in the bar about Heinlein and science fiction and art in general. It was great to get a chance to finally hear a story that featured Diana Vick about which I had heard spoken of only as a shared-joke punchline from my peeps in the Northwest. I even got a chance to sit down with Ben Yalow and get some great SMOFish history. Y'all know how much I love that!

SO, it was a good con, I had a lot of fun and I'm running the Lounge for Seattle next year, when Frank Wu, my dear friend and fellow Minicon GoH next year, will be the Artist GoH! Can't wait for it!

WorldCon is looming and I've got so much more to do! And with that in mind, away we go!



For immediate release:

Announcing the creation of Bullshit! The Speculatively Fictitious Fanzine.

All and sundry are invited to take part in the inaugural issue of Bullshit! Fan writing of all types is welcome and encouraged, with the single requirement that the main thrust of the piece may not be true. It may be a bold-faced lie, a fabrication, a tall tale, a flight of fancy, an article of spurious logic, or a fib.

Anything but the truth.

The Editor, however, shall reserve the right to reject material of a slanderous nature.

Fan art, too, is welcome and encouraged, with the caveat that it may not be in the creator's own distinctive style. It may be of some material outside of the artist's milieu, an imitation of a well-known artist, or a parodic work. This should be taken as an invitation to explore new territory, free from the confines of reputation.

The Editor shall be known by the name of William Housel, and will receive submissions at the electronic address of [william.housel@gmail.com](mailto:william.housel@gmail.com). The deadline for submissions to the initial issue of Bullshit! shall be Wednesday, the 14th of September, 2011.

# Letter Graded Mail sent to [garcia@computerhistory.org](mailto:garcia@computerhistory.org) by Our Gentle Readers

## ***The Man Himself: Warren Buff!!!!***

Hey, Chris and James!

Looks like another great special issue from Chris & James! That cover's brilliant – was it one of the proposed logo designs for the Hugos, or is it brand-new for this issue?

***It was created for the Hugo Logo contest. Every once in a while, I'll find one that had been submitted and didn't win. This one really struck me.***

The pictures of book covers lining the tops of several of your pages are a nice touch, too – I enjoyed seeing what you included (though I detect a paucity of 80s titles – any particular reason for that?). There's also some weird black space on the table of contents page – are those items you left off the listing? I notice the first thing it lists is on page 10.

***Yeah, I didn't find as many 1980s covers as I'd have liked. I was struck with just how awesome some of the covers were!***

On the editorial, something occurred to me about Chris's well-known dislikes in novelists – there's a common thread to the fiction of Heinlein and Bujold, and it seems to be the fast-paced adventure story featuring a hero who is in some way elite (Heinlein in particular seems to have felt that only the elite would make it into space). I have to wonder, Chris, if this is general

enough to extend to other, similar adventure stories – are there other writers in this milieu who similar bring the bile to the back of your throat?

You may have a point, though I do enjoy some of the Phillip Jose Farmer novels that would qualify as adventure, and there's the adventure stuff from Hubbard which I've enjoyed, but it's partly that elite hero that annoys me.

Also, I wonder who this mysterious reader with the metallic blue fingernails is – I recognize the background from Chris's Drink Tank Review of Books videos, but the person is clearly someone else.

That's Evelyn sitting in the heart of Drink Tank Studios.

James and Niall point out some really interesting sounding stuff in their articles about novels that didn't make the short-list, some of it just too obscure or peculiar to make the cut, some of it likely to be contained in the next few didn't-make-its. I confess to really not having kept up with what's in the running for the Sidewise Award this year, so while several of the books in that section of the article sound pretty cool, I just don't have context to judge.

There are a few things that James brought up that I really wanna get a hold of. I have very narrow reading habits, it seems. I've gotta work on

that, I think.

Chris then takes a more methodical approach to possible nominees, looking at what could have been replaced (my answer? Feed) with what. The titles seem to be missing in this section, as well, but they're pretty self-evident when you start reading. Since only one of the novels felt to me like it just didn't belong, I'll focus on Chris's suggestions for replacing it. I'd have been rather satisfied to see Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter on the ballot, though I don't think it would be a high-caliber winner, nor would it stand a reasonable chance. The other zombie novels you bring up are interesting, too, though I've not read them. The other choices that jump out to me as potentially interesting nominees among your list are How to Live Safely in a Science Fictional Universe, Shades of Milk and Honey, Ark, and Terminal World. While I definitely enjoyed Kraken, I don't really think it was as good as what did wind up on the ballot (with the one already-stated exception).

I really wanna finish Shades of Milk & Honey because I love MRK's writing and think that the bit I've managed to finish was spectacular. The card game she's developed around it is awesome too!

One thing I notice in the section on covers is more about me than about the other folks

who wrote in for that. For those who don't know, I live in the same county as Baen Books' home office, and thus see a whole ton of their covers. I've grown pretty much immune to their characteristic abuse of typefaces that some of the other respondents pointed out. So when I looked at the cover to Cryoburn, I really didn't notice the Impact text flying at me. Weird blind spot, that. I was also amused that I was from "The South", while most other folks were listed with a city and larger body containing it (though I think Flick was given a whole country).

***Just read the latest issue of Dark Matter and they did an interview with a Book Designer. That was a nice touch as everyone***

***focuses on the Cover Artists and as Cryoburn obviously shows, it's the Designer who has such an important role. And Warren Buff, to me, IS the South!***

At this point, it became apparent what was going on with those missing items I commented on earlier – my copy of Acrobat Reader was crapping out. Given that this is the case, and the remaining text of the issue has become an illegible mess, I'm going to cut this letter short, with apologies, but say that I deeply enjoyed reading this issue (yesterday, when Acrobat Reader was working). If found it highly informative, and it gave me chances to reconsider some of the works I'd read. One

disappointment is that no one picked up on the coolest thing in The Dervish House – the beautiful layering of microcosm-macrocosm throughout the story, and the use of the science fictional elements to bring it even further out. Ah, well – that's what I get for not writing it myself.

Warren Buff

***I caught that a bit in my article about The Dervish House and architecture, but I held on to that for the McDonald issue that's coming up in the Fall. I think that's an impressive part of the story.***





## Politically Correct Humor by Taral Wayne

Not long ago, I was writing to one of my correspondents about fanzines. We had been talking about the ways that the digital revolution in producing fanzines has, perhaps, disguised how the art form has been in decline. As well, many changes have been brought about by the aging of fans, who are no longer in their twenties, but more often in their fifties or sixties. Still other changes have been caused by the mere passage of time.

For example, I suggested that one reason for the difference in fanwriting in the past and fanwriting in the present might be that we've become too enlightened, and have lost our sense of humour in the process. It isn't nice anymore to notice differences between people. Charles Burbee, a noted humorist of the 1940s drove Al Ashley, the president of LASFS, nearly crazy by poking fun at his eccentricities. British fans in the 70's were so rude in ridiculing each others' foibles that I really don't know why there wasn't bloodshed. But, we see very little of that sort of humour anymore. Have we

forgotten how to make fun of ourselves?

For instance, I wrote to my correspondent, imagine a politically correct conversation between two fans who are loafing near the registration desk at a convention. We'll call them Edgar and Chauncey, in honour of two other interlocutors of note. Our pair of loafers notice two strangers walking by. One of them is short, fat, bald, and had a huge red nose. He was dressed in a green velvet Steampunk outfit, with a knit Rastacap and fake green beard that made him look like a West Indian leprechaun with a bad head cold. He laughed with a high, shrill voice like a girl, and clumped along on a walker hung with shopping bags and cheap, plastic bangles of various sorts. He also had an odd habit of shaking his left arm every ten feet or so, and used very foul language.

His companion didn't stand out at all, apart from badges on his vest, and a shirt bearing a picture of a green ogre and smiling donkey.

So, Edgar turns to Chauncey and says, "There's something you don't see everyday."

Chauncey looks around, sees nothing and shrugs.

"The funny looking guy next to the one in the Shrek t-shirt," adds Edgar, "Did you ever see such a weirdo?"

"Oh, I don't know Edgar," says Chauncey, giving his friend a suspicious look. "Which one – they look exactly the same to me. Don't they to you?"

"Oh! For sure," Edgar back peddles with a little nervous laughter. "Only a bigot dwells on superficial appearances. In every way that matters, people are all the same... right?"

"And beautiful?"

"Yes. Yes. Beautiful!"

For some reason, Edgar didn't think nearly so many things were funny after that.

It's rare that a film will leave the door open after it's over. There are those that believe that is how all film should be, you're only seeing a snapshot of a world after all, so it should not be so definite. Things should be left open. Some of the most significant filmmakers in recent history have been of the opinion that there should be more of it, perhaps most notably John Sayles in his film *Limbo*, which gave you the question of whether or not the folks on the island were saved or what. It was a *The ending of Chasing Amy* could be seen in the same light. Hell, you'd think that more filmmakers would make that choice since it leaves the door open for sequels! There have been many films that had open endings, but few of them have done it so well as *The Day The Earth Caught Fire*.

Basically, it's a film about our own problems with the H-Bomb. There are people who believe that all films from 1955-1970 were entirely about the effects and potential destruction by the H-Bomb. Here's it's obvious that that's the fact. The story is very simple, to a degree. The Earth has been knocked off course by large H-Bomb tests. The first sign was that an eclipse came three days early. Now true, the timing of an eclipse would be much less affected than the location from where the eclipse would be visible. That's fine, it's the idea that systems we've had perfected for centuries were just out of whack.

That's such a great moment.

Now, that's the big picture, but really, the film isn't all that much about the bomb at all. It's really about the relationships of a series of people in and around a London newspaper that cracks the case and then goes on to cover the relationships that encounter the life of a Newspaper man. It's pretty simple.

And there is where the payoff hits.

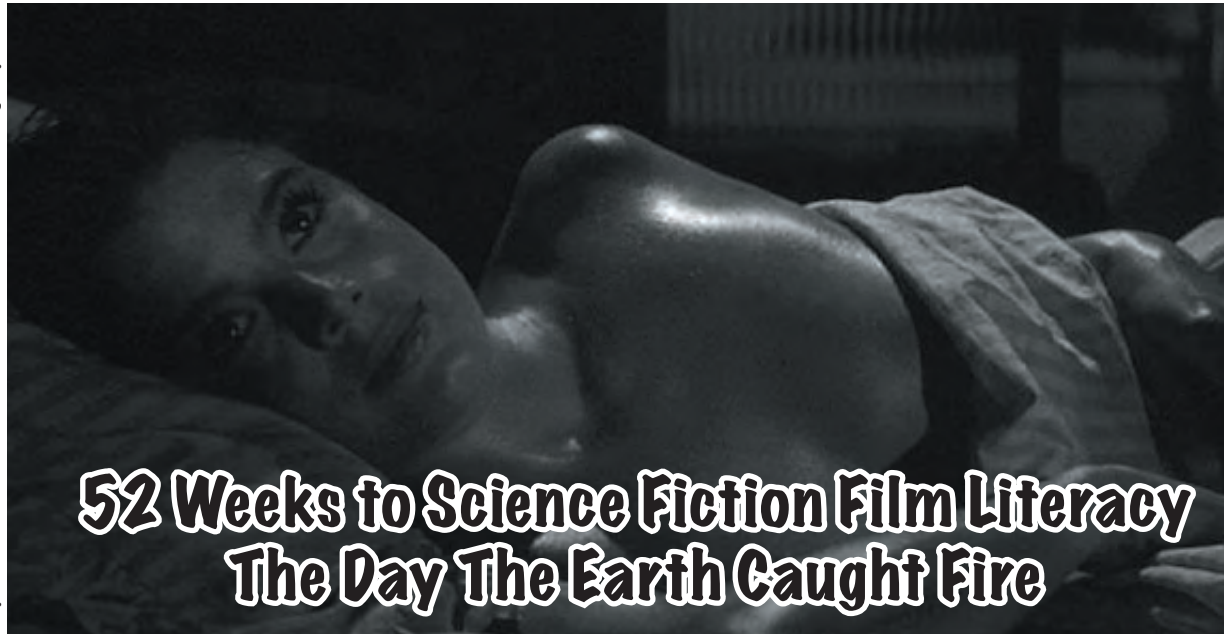
The structure is pert-near perfect. They open with a single dude roaming the streets of a seemingly post-apocalyptic London. It's an impressive bit of Matte work that made London look awesome. The Thames is dry. That's a good start if'n your goal is to make it look like London has been inalterably changed. The set design and cinematography is pretty fantastic, though a few of the effects are less than stellar, even for the time. With the Earth being knocked into a hotter area, the waters around England start evaporating, leading to incredible fogs. There's a

great scene where the journalist, Peter Stenning (played with a James Bond-level sauvoineur by Edward Judd) and telephonist and information font Jeannie (played by the incredibly hot Janet Munro) are having a picnic. It's a great scene, but it's far from the only one in the film.

Bringing us back to that opening, Janet Munro is sweating and nearly naked when Peter comes in from the over-heated London day as the bombs are about to go off that will put Earth back in the right orbit. That scene is so sensual and Judd and Munro play off each other so very very well. It was amazing to see what they pulled off in the movie because the two of them had not only chemistry together, but an increased screen presence. It was a lot like watching a Hepburn-Tracey flick. Either of them were massive movie stars and had great chemistry, but even when they weren't on screen together, they were both somehow magnified by being in the same film. These two had it all in *The Day*

*The Earth Caught Fire*.

Judd's performance was that excellent type that combines bitterness with damaged, with talent. Stenning had previously been the up-and-comer, the next big thing for the paper, only to be reduced to drunken rubble by a painful divorce. His pal sometimes writes his articles for him, and that's what makes the fact that the wrapper of the story is Peter writing the story



## 52 Weeks to Science Fiction Film Literacy

### The Day The Earth Caught Fire

himself.

Well, he tries to write it, but the platens are melting and he ends up having to dictate it over the phone.

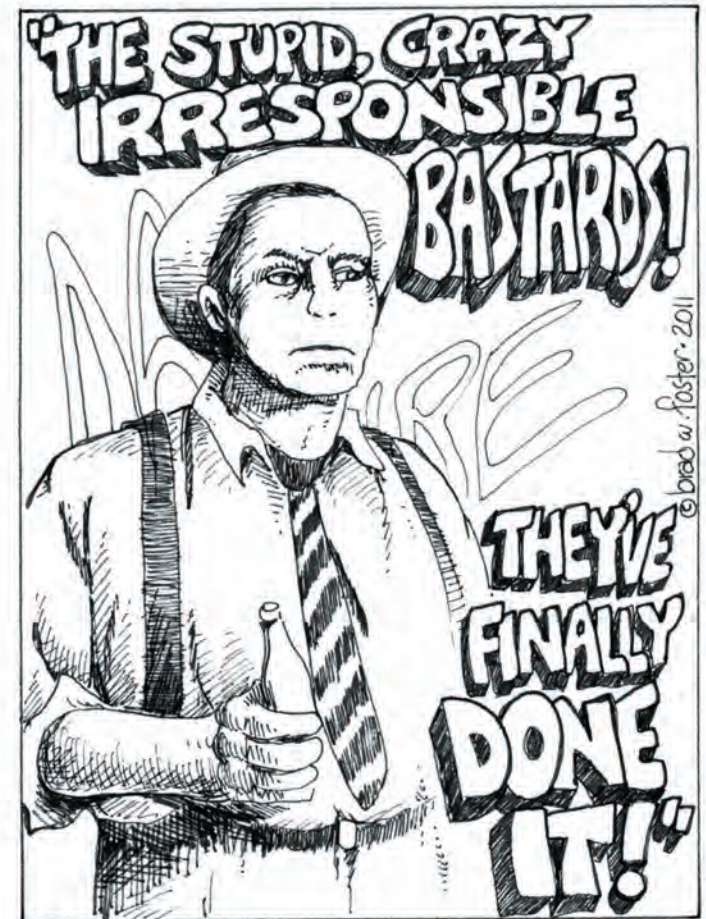
It was the coming of doom that clarifies him, and it makes him much better. He is what we hope we are. He manages to come back from the brink because the world is falling apart. He's the one who has managed to get better, and don't we all hope that when we're faced with the end that we'll be able to rise to meet it better than we were when things easy?

The filmmaking was tip-top. The editing perfect, the timing great, and the direction flawless. English genre filmmaking was at its peak around 1961. It was out of the pack of directors and producers like Val Guest that led to things like Quatermass and Dr. Who. Guest was a great writer and director and that generation of filmmakers were all massively important to the development of English science fiction media. I think one of the reasons that Sci-Fi got better ingrained in the English mainstream was that they had a generation of films and television that were all powerful and well-done... well, for varying values of well-done.

The ending is the thing that most folks talk about. We see two different front pages of the paper: World Doomed and World Saved. We then hear bells. We are never told if the world has been saved or if the bells are tolling for we. It's a simple and effective ending to a story that was powerful in a Casablanca way. The troubles of a newspaperman, his son, his editor and a beautiful young woman don't amount to a hill of beans when the Earth is hurtling towards the sun, but it's really where the interest is. You could remake

The Day The Earth Caught Fire and focus on the scientists trying to save us and what you'd have could turn out well, but what I want to know is how does it all change the lives of those involved. Can a relationship survive a time when these things happen? If the Earth was still on the way to solar incineration, what would people do with their remaining time? How long could you hold out without the barrel of a gun looking mighty tasty? What if the counterblast sent us in the other direction, flying out forever into space, the sun becoming a distant speck among all the other stars? There are so many questions and they are all made possible by an ending that does not reveal all the secrets.

One of my favorite short films of the last decade was a science fiction short called Sunday Afternoon. This Canadian film shows a group of people in a convenience store in Quebec as the quickly heating Earth is being consumed by fire. The United States has been consumed and now it moves north. The thing is the relationships of the people in the store are what the short focuses on. There is a young man, a weed dealer of some clout, and a young Ablack woman who wants nothing to do with him or the one last joint he's been holding on to. There's the angry shop owner and various other characters. Everyone is sweating. Everyone is tense. Watching it, you know that the world is ending, but you also know that to the



people, it doesn't matter. What matters is that these people have to deal with their endings.

And in the end, they smoke that joint together.

That is the direct child of The Day The Earth Caught Fire. The film is marvelous, and if you're looking for a good tense thriller, this is it. The Day The Earth Caught Fire is one of those films that defines the power that science fiction can impart to storytelling.