

# WEIRD SCIENCE

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***That's right, it's a Mo Starkey cover! Gotta love it!***

***I'm doing a wedding later this afternoon. Chris Erichson and Jean Martin. Jean, of course, the editor of SF/SF and a good friend. A lot of BArea's fan writer types are gonna be there, from Espana and Me, to Mette Hedin (probably the most underrated fan writer out there today) and Brian Little (whose art we'll be seeing more of) and Kevin and Andy. A solid bunch of folks. I'm officiating, which is weird enough, and it's a Steampunk-y themed wedding, so I'm dressed as a time-traveling preacher, kinda.***

***I don't like costumes,, really. They actually scare me. I don't regularly wear them, I much prefer t-shirts with fun sayings and the like. It does make things for Linda and I a little difficult as she often goes to dinners and such with themes and required costuming and it just scares the dickens out of me. Is sad.***

***Got a note from John Hertz about Westercon -***

## ***Classics of Science Fiction***

by John Hertz

We'll discuss three classics at Westercon LXV, one discussion each. Come to as many as you like. You'll be welcome to join in.

Each of our three is well known. Each is famous in a different way. Have you read them?

Here's our working definition: "A classic is a work that survives its own time. After the currents which might have sustained it have changed, it remains, and is seen to be worthwhile for itself." If you have a better definition, bring it.

Edward A. Abbott

*Flatland (1884)*

This little book is well loved even outside our field. Because it teaches geometry? Relativity? Because it uses up the last pure original idea? Because it's so old the satire no longer stings and people feel safe - no, what about the women? Because it's well made? Aha!

Robert à Heinlein

*Double Star (1956)*

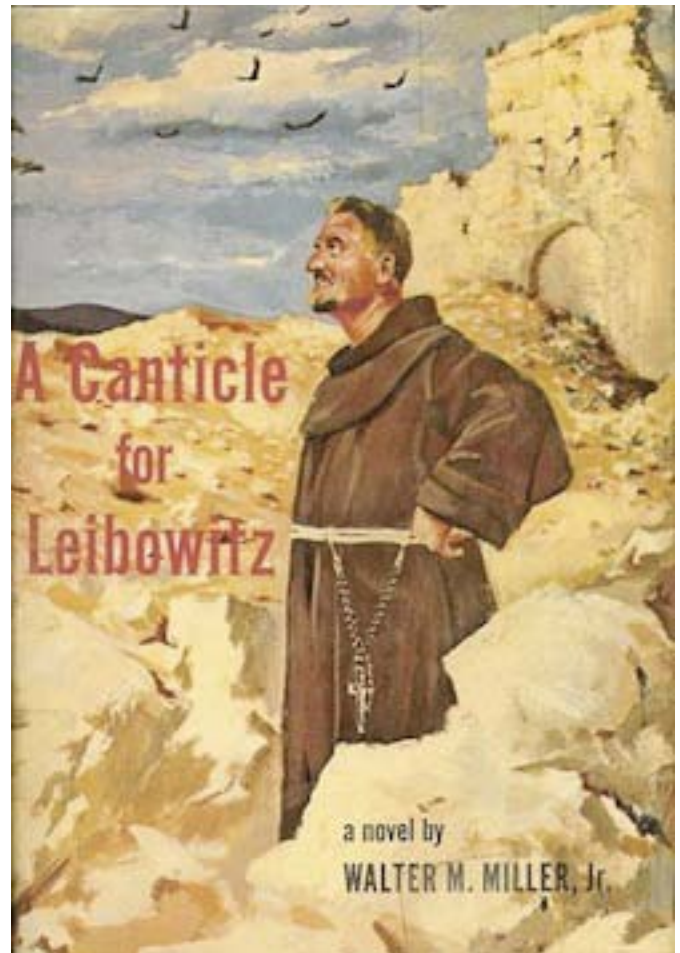
Here was Heinlein's first Hugo. The Kelly Freas illustrations for Astounding were on display at Noreascon IV; the February 1956 cover was particularly wonderful. James Blish admired Lorenzo's growth under pressure. Is a statesman just a quotation box, or is Lorenzo so unreliable a narrator that in face by becoming Belafonte he turns modest?

Walter M. Miller, Jr.

*A Canticle for Leibowitz (1960)*

We're not long on stories that well paint any mainstream religion. This one shines and soars - I warned you about these puns - with the Catholic Church at center stage, the light relentless, but not ruthless, on Catholics and everyone else. Nor is that more vital to the tale that its characterization, selection and timing - alas, another.

***I love Canticle, one of my favorites, and Flatland just isn't my mindset. We all know how I feel about Heinlein in all his forms, but it's an interesting list and you should go! Wish I was gonna be there...***



# **Reviewed - Reaper by K D McEntire**

## **By Diane Osborne**

Publisher: Pyr

Join McEntire in a walk on the Other side, where Reapers, lost souls, Walkers, spirit webs and other creatures are easier to figure out than friends and relatives. Weird relatives. As in really weird. Case in point: Wendy's mom. I really want to understand WTF she was up to and why - if understanding does not permanently warp my mind and soul.

McEntire's *Reaper* romps through strangeness, is zenfully relaxing and chock full of "Hmmm... I hadn't considered that angle" and "Please oh please oh please! No - don't let Piotr! Waaaah! Doh? OMG - she pulled it off." moments. By the first chapter, little concerns like being unemployed or pondering the meaning of life were left behind as I flipped page after page of this delightful story. Fast paced, thrilling without inducing a heart-attack, it entertains and stimulates, schooling the reader in gazillions of interesting tidbits so smoothly you don't realize you just absorbed a whole new world until you set down the book and shift gears back to the here and now. Blissfully relaxing because it is easy to imagine that we could be stuck in Wendy's shoes and are not.

Any nightmares that pop up are banished with the confidence that this too will be handled. It may be messy. It may not make sense. It will be dealt with. The good guys will take a deep breath and, after a hot shower and some kind of food, be ready for more.

My post-read to-do list:

1. Sketch a flow chart of Piotr's background, then take a stab at filling in the blanks
2. Put together a compendium on otherworldly stuff - how what works why, how it kills / is killed, healed / heals, etc.
3. Run a comparison of complexity, Machiavelli v. the cast of a thousand plots - Mary, Elise, Jane, Emma, etc.
4. Figure out what else the Lost children may have up their sleeves.
5. Wonder what is in store for Wendy, Piotr, Eddie, Elle, etc.
6. Buy a pint of plain vanilla ice cream, smother it in warm butter-scotch, chocolate and maraschino cherries, eat while repeating to self "There's no place like home. There's no place like home."



On the TMJ scale, *Reaper* scores +3 - muscles know they have been tense from suspense but are now relaxed. Author pulled off an entertaining, coherent piece of writing that promises more to come.

regards,  
Diane O.

# **Altered States**

## **Taral Wayne**

**California is in a state of crisis... again. It is unable to meet its payrolls, bills and debts, so once again it faces the inescapable relationship between revenues and expenditures. The governor is at wit's end, stating that there is no alternative but to add to state revenues... somehow. And just as surely as suicide bombers are unpopular at nudist camps, the good people of California refuse to pay a single cent more in taxes. They are just as insistent, however, that pensions, benefits, standard of education, health care, food inspectors, upkeep of roads and highways, maintenance of the aqueducts, subsidies for public transit and levels of police protection be maintained at the high level they had become accustomed over the last few generations as America's most progressive and prosperous state. But no one seems to see that, obviously, this can't be done.**

**Instead, the voter imagines that "government waste" is to blame – union excesses, bloated bureaucracies and overpaid civil servants are unproductive drones costing the taxpayer billions of dollars. The panacea offered is a wholesale slaughter of public employees, axing payrolls and cutting wages to set a good example – after all, it isn't as though teaching children or nursing the elderly were a valuable service that only skilled professionals could provide.**

**Every voter, however, believes his or her own job at some office desk or sales counter is sacred. Nor can you cut his or her wages, because it's already hard enough to make ends meet. But only let the unproductive sinecures be slashed from the public teat, they believe, and the economy will be set to rights again. The "ordinary" man can continue to live the smug, self-righteous Good Life ... while making only a feeble gesture toward paying for it.**

**What no one wants to acknowledge is a lethal disconnect between what the voter wants and grim reality. In California, the voter has come to believe that the society he or she lives in is a state of nature, and doesn't have to be supported by the efforts of Man. Believing that drinking water flowing along aqueducts and highways sprouting overnight are acts of nature comes as effortlessly to this kind of thinking as the certainty that the sun will rise in the morning and rain will fall from the sky – totally ignoring the fact that in California rain does not fall from the sky and crops are watered by a extensive – and expensive – system for diverting water from places that actually have it. The citizens of the Golden State mistakenly believe they can live the fantasies of Ayn Rand and still enjoy a highly structured and totally artificial lifestyle.**

**Well, they were mistaken. California may be golden, but it is not a state of nature. It is a highly complex machine with hundreds of millions of working parts with fine tolerances, that must be maintained every bit as meticulously as the space shuttle. If not... the machine sooner or later fails. The water stops flowing along the aqueducts and the highways fall apart. Soon, it becomes impossible to move goods and resources from place to another, services become unavailable, and the economy shrivels away to nothing. Population levels become impossible to sustain, and, in extreme cases, archeologists examine the ruins of your civilization a thousand years later and wonder what became of it.**

**Californians of the last two or three generations haven't even given their state the benefit of maintenance sufficient for a second-hand motor scooter, let alone a space shuttle.**

**What the state of California really is, is a state of denial.**



## 52 Weeks to Science Fiction Film Literacy - Weird Science

The funny thing about *Weird Science* is that ultimately, it's the lightest film on the 52 Weeks list. Slight might be the best way to look at it. If you look at the history of science fiction film, there was a turn, right about 1950, when for the first time you were seeing science fiction films targeted in larger numbers towards teens. These were typically cheaper films, many that were really horror films, often with terrible effects. It was the rise of the Drive-In, the challenge of competing with Television, and most importantly, the redefinition of the film industry following the divestment of the Major studios from owning their chains of movie theatres. These b-films are some of the most important in the history of film because of what they did for the following generation of filmmakers. While directors like Bergman, Antonioni and Kurosawa were influencing directors like Spielberg, Coppola and Lucas, it was the lower-budget guys making movies like *The Angry Red Planet* and *The Creature Walks Among Us* that influenced the generation of filmmakers that started to rise up in the 1970s and 80s. But it wasn't just the films of those times that were influencing filmmakers, but it was everything from films to trading cards to comic books, especially the EC comics like, wait for it, *Weird Science*, that really made a big difference.

John Hughes was one of those guys who was so seriously influenced by the stuff that was coming out in the various popular culture forums. He was a lot more highbrow than a lot of folks think, but he had a feel for popular culture that would serve him very well in his future endeavors. After a stint with *National Lampoon*, including writing the *Vacation* films (or at least the first one) he set out to make teen movies, starting with perhaps the best of the 1980s, *Sixteen Candles*. *Weird Science* was one of the films that he made that folks think weren't really in his wheelhouse.

I disagree.

*Weird Science* is the story of two geeks back in a time when it wasn't cool to be a geek. The story of Wyatt and Gary, geeks who have each other and little else. They are bullied by Ian and Max, the hip bullies. Robert Downey Jr.'s Ian is pretty awesome, perhaps the best and most likeable bully in the history of film. The guys start to develop a way to create a woman for their own needs using their home computer, which then leads the two of them to hack into a government mainframe, and then a lightning strike leads to the Barbie doll they hooked up to the computer to become alive in the form of Lisa, played by Kelly LeBrock.

OK, let me pause here and say that Kelly LeBrock was never a bigger star than she was at the release of *Weird Science*. She was also one of the most desirable women in the world at the time. She had made her first acting turn in *The Woman in Red*, a Gene Wilder film that I thought was pretty darn good. It was also an impressive debut as she was pretty good at it.

Now, here, she's very impressive playing a role that is actually really hard to nail. She has to come off as both temptress and guru, seductress and teacher. It is a difficult role because she is easily the sexiest woman in the world of *Weird Science*, and any other world I can think of, and she's so wise. She is *Mary Poppins* with deeper cleavage. In other ways, she's *Dumbo's* feather. More on that later.



She takes a shower with the boys, who are wearing clothes while she's all the way naked. She's amazing, willing to do anything they wish, but they're not willing to go

through with the ideas that they'd had for her before she came around. They're timid, they've been handed the keys to the ultimate sports car, but they're not willing to put her into gear. It's to be expected, they're inexperienced young men in love with an ideal they never thought was attainable. When the rules change instantly, the dive into the new waters can be stunning. She plays the desirability to perfection, but more importantly, she manages to make it feel like she's improving them. There's a ton of stuff that makes me happy to watch. The way she works it. Kelly's got an intimacy that makes sense and a sexuality that feels unforced as well. The scene where she transforms the boys' clothing into stylish garb and then takes them to a blues club. The guys are uptight until Lisa gives them some booze and they loosen up, leading to Gary, played perfectly by Anthony Michael Hall, delivering the legendary line 'Bitches can't hold they smoke!'.

Now, this is a very interesting scene. Lisa has taken them out of their comfort zone and plunged them into the Blues Club, and she's done it for a good reason, to give them more confidence and to get them to loosen up. She's wonderful in the scene, though it's Hall who really comes up funniest. She's the driver of the scene, and it shows that she's not Jeanie, though essentially she is.

And there's an important point - she is not a slave. She would gladly do whatever they asked (or told her to do) but she's never asked to do anything that she doesn't want to do. In fact, as masters of a wish-granting woman. She also knows this, which makes her role even harder to play. She can't be the dominatrix, nor the dormouse, she must play that motivator, the mover, but she must also not be the one that makes them make the moves they must make. Yes, I've reread that sentence and I realise it's such a mess, but it says what it needs to say.

There are two young women who the boys are interested in. They happen to be the girlfriends of the Bullies, which is very cool. Lisa plans a huge rager of a party as Gary's parents are out of town. The party is an essential part of the Teen film. It is the setting where all roles are truly explained and examined, and usually changed. The legendary teen film parties are found in several films, the three most important being *Dazed and Confused*, *Can't Hardly Wait*, and the classic *Risky Business*. The party is amazing, Lisa has brought around a whole bunch of awesome, but most importantly, everyone is there, including Ian and Max.

Now here's an important part. Ian and Max hit on Lisa, which is funny, but she turns them down by saying that she belongs to Wyatt and Gary. By saying that, she is admitting that she has no free will, that they make all the calls, maybe. It could also be that she understands what that will mean, that Ian and Max will go to Wyatt and Gary and make some sort of deal for her. This is somewhat reminiscent of the recent *Mad Men* storyline where one character dealt her sex out as a way to get another character to make a choice that would allow a third character to ultimately break-out on his own. It's not a perfect analogy, but it's there. She understands that by offering herself, by peddling her sex, she can ultimately get the boys to do what she most wants them to: to get her men to make their own moves, her desires, whatever they were, be damned.

And there's another point, what are her desires and needs? She can transmogrify matter into whatever she wants, she can wipe memories (like she does with Gary's father to the point where he can not remember his existence after she pulls a gun on him) and do all sorts of things that are impossible, but we never really see her desires other than the desire to get the Guys to grow a pair. Ultimately, it's an anti-feminist form, but on the other hand, Lisa is a woman who has ultimate power. She is serving two boys, boys who are also so impotent in their own skins that they fail to make any sort of motion in the direction of taking advantage of the possibility of a beautiful woman in their control, and at the same time, she's controlling them. Well, maybe not controlling them, though she certainly controls many people, but she pushes them towards the goal she wants to see them achieve. She was created by them, so perhaps she's enamored of her creators.

And that's something that you can look at in a very different way. She's been created by two young men who she is now shepherding towards their own potential. But they are still her creators. She owes her existence to the machinations of Wyatt and Gary, which would mean that they are her gods. What would we say to our creators? It's actually the point of the film *Prometheus*. The story is one of a group of scientists on the way to a planet where the ones who planted life on Earth. Dr. Weyland has the feeling that if they created life, they can stop death. It's an interesting take. I love the way that Lisa treats her Creators, she makes them the best they can be and wants them to succeed. At the same time, people who are in a position to interact with their gods are seldom as rational and restrained as Lisa is. She does not worship them, she does not make sacrifices to them, but she does serve them. That idea is deep, the entire basis of religion is that we must live our lives in service of a set of



ideals, often in relationship to an entity, sometimes unseen, sometimes present, often obscure. The way she treats Wyatt and Gary is not the way you treat a God, it's more like a Genie, but not one who grants you wishes as much as one that understands your goals and dreams and attempts to make them happen.

Perhaps they are not her creators, but instead they simply summoned her. We are not told where she came from other than from their experiment with the computer. She certainly had powers, far beyond an average human. This is a fine metaphor for what computers made possible in the 1980s. This was a time of great change in what was possible with computers, and they were improving so many fields so quickly. From Medicine, specifically in the areas of imaging and drug design, to the arts to communications to industrial design. She was designed by a computer, a Human (possibly) and as such she is better than any other before because she was designed by computer. Such a simple thought.

The Guys try to impress Ian and Max by making another Lisa for them, but they forget to hook-up the doll and end up calling forth a Pershing missile that was on the cover of *Time*. It's an awesome scene where it busts out and pops through the roof. At this point, the party gets nuts and Lisa apparently calls forth a crew of mutant bikers.

This is where it gets silly. Gary has to get rid of them, so he pulls the gun that Lisa pulled on his father and they back down. The bikers also mock



the Guys and point out embarrassing facts. This drives Gary to pull the gun, which is another of those classic Reagan-era statements. If you are pushed too far, you MUST pull a weapon. It's exactly like Back to the Future in that respect. Force is the only thing that can ultimately solve your ultimate problem. That's how these things go. They stand up for themselves, and though Gary indicates that he believes that the gun is a water pistol (as Lisa had demonstrated earlier) but is an actual Gun and Gary fires into the air.

Despite the fact that they failed to build a Lisa for Ian and Max, they still end up with the girls. They are the perfect 1980s young ladies, by the way. If I was making a book about the styles of women in the 1980s, those two would be my choice.

Weird Science was one of the earliest of Hughs' directorial steps, following Sixteen Candles and The Breakfast Club, the two that were the defining films in the 1980s High School genre. After Weird Science, it was Ferris Bueller's Day Off and She's Having a Baby. After Uncle Buck, perhaps the best performance from John Candy in a leading role, his career as a director kinda fizzled, with his last directed film being Curly Sue. He was still a major writer, including writing monster hits like Home Alone and 101 Dalmations. His work in Weird Science was really the only time he worked in science fiction, it's odd because it doesn't feel like a script from a guy who had never worked in the genre before. He had several unproduced scripts that were in the genre, but he had never directed anything like it.

Strangely, Weird Science has aged pretty well. Geeks are no longer geeks, but they are such over-the-top geeks, that you still get the feeling that they'd be outcasts. Computers are no longer mystery machines that could be capable of building a better human. In fact, now they're machines that are not a mystery at all; in many ways that are machines that we are all too familiar with to the point that they seem to have taken over our lives. You could easily make a movie like Weird Science today, but you wouldn't be able to make it as a science fiction movie - it would have to be a fantasy, which would move it even more into the genie realm.

One thing I have to mention from this rewatchign I did for this piece is that the performance by Bill Pullman was way over the top, but also so much fun. He played Wyatt's brother who actually pulls a shotgun on Wyatt after he comes back and discovers the condition of the house after the party. It's hilarious and it shows that science fiction comedy in the 1980s was a big deal. There was Ghostbusters, Weird Science, Short Circuit, and Spaceballs. In the 1990s, we had the more mature version with GalaxyQuest, Men in Black and the like, which were bigger on effects and still huge on comedy.

And Weird Science is plenty comedic.