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The last few weeks have been rough. I have a USB stick that had a bunch of art on it that went bad. All the files on it, not only the art but the Podcasts, audio and video files, were all corrupt. This was a bad thing. Luckily, I found good versions of a lot of it (Thankfully the wonderful pieces that Steve Stiles have sent me, including that -> abstract which is one of my all-time favorite of his pieces. I love abstract art, you all know that, and I'm so excited that Steve's sent me a few of these.

And luckily Mo sent me the covers again. AND I still have the DVDs that Ditmar sent me with his art, so I didn't really lose much, mostly older stuff, but still... WAH!!!!!

So, this issue is a little late, but I hope it's worth it. We've got a piece from the Hugo Award-winning Ursula Vernon in favor of the YA Hugo. I loved her work Digger and I was so happy she won Best Graphic Story. She makes some good points, and I think they are things we should be thinking about, no matter what our general thinking on the subject is.

Now, I've got a piece about Pi, one of my favorite movies that is often over-looked as SF.

Also, it's Crocktoberfest! I've been using my Crockpot all month long! My favorite so far is Flat Iron steaks, marinated in black pepper, cayenne, garlic, ginger, and Tamari. That was it, then I put it in the crockpot with a bit of the sauce I made from a Spicy roast I did last weekend. It was awesome!

So, here's the stuff for this issue! And, I will call on you to send something along for Journey Planet's James Bond issue, deadline November 1st!

Steve Stiles
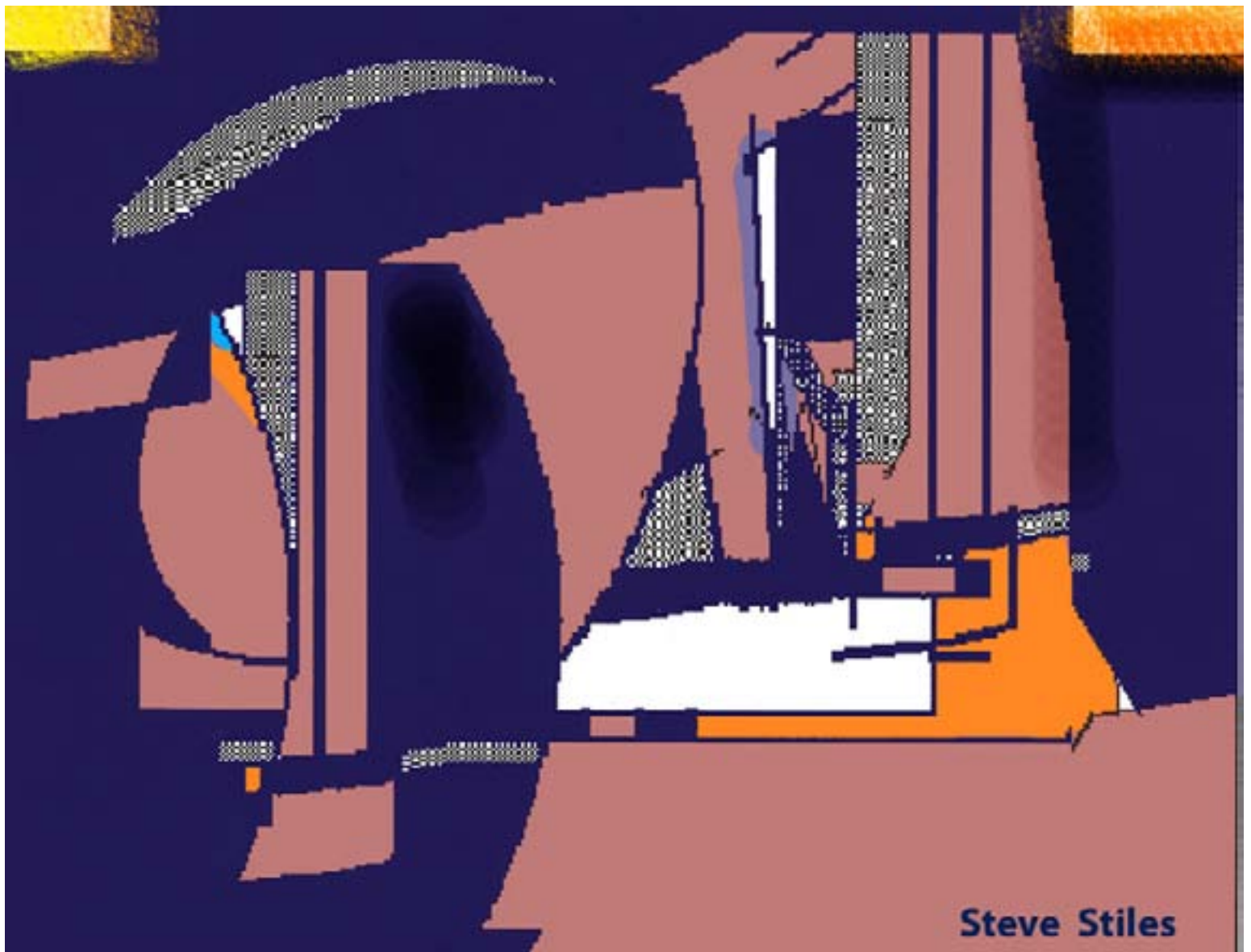
LoCs and Such to garcia@computerhistory.org

Ursula Vernon's Take on The Hugo Award for Best YA Book

I suppose the best place to begin is by putting a collar and a nametag on my dog in this particular fight.

I'm a middle-grade author.

That means, in the arcane realms of kid's fiction, that I am writing for 8-12-year-olds, and also means that technically my current work is not eligible for the proposed YA Hugo. A broad range of kids read my work, from the young and fiercely precocious on up, but the primary target is a group called "reluctant readers" who tend to view books as an instrument of torture rather than pleasure.

I think these kids are important. I think reaching these kids is important. Some of them will come to reading later in life, but many of them won't.

During the debates about YA books, we heard a lot of versions of what I call the "geek origin story." ("Bitten by a radioactive copy of Heinlein, young Peter Parker grew up to be THE AMAZING FANDOM-MAN...") It goes something like this: "There I was, a social misfit in grade school, and books were my only escape, and I read at an insanely high level for my age and I went to the library and checked out X ("X" is usually Heinlein, sometimes Asimov or Bradbury, depending on age may even be Piers Anthony or Mercedes Lackey, but fill in your chosen book here) and it CHANGED MY LIFE and then I grew up and discovered other people like me and now this is where I live."

And this is a good and true story, and there is absolutely nothing wrong with it, as long as it is not treated as universal.

Because it's not universal. For every one of us who picked up The Hobbit at age eight/nine/ten/third trimester, there's a kid who got five pages in and said "This is boring," and went and fooled around on the computer or read a comic book or went back to Legos.

And yet, this same kid may pick up Hunger Games or Harry Potter and read the entire thing. (I say "may." I am actually speaking of a specific kid, my boyfriend's son, who would chew ground glass rather than read The Hobbit, and who has plowed through all kinds of middle-grade and YA books. But I'm trying to speak in

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generalities rather than go "THAT KID RIGHT THERE, YES, YOU, WITH THE GLASSES, YES, I'M TALKING ABOUT YOU, AND ALSO PICK YOUR LAUNDRY UP OFF THE FLOOR, IT LOOKS LIKE A BOMB WENT OFF.")

I believe that these kids could--if we let them--contribute extraordinarily to fandom. I think fandom will be poorer if it leaves them out and sticks to a single origin story, where you must be a precocious reader and find adult SF in the library because nobody will sit with you at lunch.

I think in order to get them to contribute, we need to talk about their books. I think we need to acknowledge the worth and value of those books. And I don't think that's going to be an unpleasant task, because frankly, a lot of really exciting stuff happening these days is happening in YA. It's a field that's willing to take risks right now. Many, many adults, self included, read YA because there's so much fabulous going on there.

There's a lot of other things to be said, and a lot of arguments one could make on both sides, but rather than write something that may soon be eligible for novella status, I'll end here. I think this is important, I think it hurts no one to give it the four-year trial run that comics got, and I think we might see some very positive results.
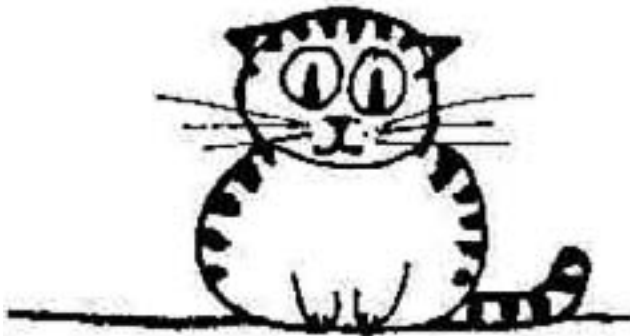
Some science fiction films have all the markers flying high. They'll feature a flying car in the first moments, or a Martian walking around in a business suit. Some will be a bit more sly about it. They'll follow someone making the morning paper delivery only to pull back and show that there are two suns or the hull of a spaceship. And some go even deeper, only revealing that the sci-fi is in the DNA of the story and not in the presentation across the screen. To me, that's what Pi represents. It wasn't until months after I first saw it that I realised it was a science fiction film, and it was months after that when I took it to heart as one of the truly great SF movies of all-time.

Let's start with the story. Max is a number theory guy who is also something of a savant as he can do HUGE math problems in his head. He also suffers from terrible migraines. He is non-social, save for a girl who he does math for like a performing poodle, and his former math teacher. Max has a computer called Euclid. Using Euclid, he finds that there's a 216 digit number that he uses to pick a stock. It's an awful pick, and he throws away the printout Euclid made, but the next morning finds that it exploded in value! That starts the film's major story. The number is the focus of a lot of people, as a Wall Street firm and a Torah scholar approach him for his work. He is offered a computer chip called Ming Mecca, which he installs into Euclid, which Max uses to analyze the Torah for patterns. It eventually finds the same 216 number pattern. Euclid refuses to print out the number, so as he starts writing it down, he realises that he already has the pattern and he basically becomes The God of Numbers!

And, of course, he has a sudden headache that's so bad he passes out.

The rest of the film is Max showing how he can visualize the stock market and other systems without the help of Euclid, and the agents of the Wall Street firm trying to force him to explain the number. Lenny, the Torah scholar, tries to get Max to tell them, insisting that 'That number belongs to G_D!' and represents the unspeakable name of God.

It turns out that his former math teacher, who he had a falling out with, has died, and when Max visits his apartment and finds that he'd been working on the number too! This leads to Max having a serious headache, not taking his meds and basically he goes on a trip and then gives himself a power-drill lobotomy.

Yeah, it's that kind of movie.

This was the sort of coming out party for director/writer Darren Aronofsky. The guy was a sort of genius, his film school thesis project, Supermarket Sweep, was up for the Student Academy Award. That's actually harder to get nominated for than a regular Academy Award as there are so many student film made every year (one estimate I've heard from folks in the festival

world is that 20 thousand student films are made every year) and while he didn't win, it got him some notice. The 1990s were the years of self-financed tiny films. Kevin Smith did Clerks, and Robert Rodriguez El Mariachi, on tiny budgets, each putting up the money themselves, Rodriguez famously getting the money by putting himself through a clinical drug test. Out of this world came Aronofsky, who took 100 dollars each from various friends and family on the promise of giving back 150 if the movie made money. This was a HUGE risk, as there was no way he could afford to hire name actors, but still, he managed to sell it to a distributor, Artisan Entertainment, for a Million Bucks! That was huge! It came out in the theatres and made roughly three million bucks. That was good, in line with what a lot of

the other big-time self-financed films of the time were doing. True, it was no Blair Witch Project, but what else was?

The success of Pi got him the right to direct Requiem for a Dream, which was one of the best films of the last twenty years. Not SF at all, it was a psychosexual thriller, and one of the best.

Pi represents the start of what Aronofsky excels at: the unreliable narrator with questions of what is real. That's a classic SF theme, and one which writers like Philip K. Dick have mastered. Here, you have to wonder who much of what Max does is real, who in the story is real, and what the path of the narrator is. It's a tough road to play in, as we think that the narrator is reliable at the start, but then it turns out that

he isn't, or maybe he is. It's hard to tell. This is something that marks Requiem for a Dream so thoroughly. There is a question as to what is real all over it, and the reason for the creation of the alternate realities plays a central role.

What is very interesting with Pi is that here, theories are central, and theories are presented as universals that interact with one another in all realms. High-level mathematical systems are equated with religious systems, which are contrasted with game theory, economic modeling and especially, Go. These things are all shown to be equal in that all are effected by the number, all perform in accordance with it, and all are shown to be specifically destructive if they are not properly understood when executed. In fact, it's an interesting theory of mine that this is really a story of the individual over the corporation. Max is a genius, a singular genius, and when he was given the Ming Mecca chip by the Big Corporation, he was able to use it not only to his advantage, but to solve problems well outside of his realm. When the Corporation tries to use the number they get from the print-out that Max misplaces, they make a mess of it. This is easily seen as a metaphor for the condition of the American tech industry. The majors like Microsoft and HP were caught flat-footed by the web, for the most part, and they were behind small teams, and some individuals. If you look at the way the web was progressing, you see that groups like Amazon and eBay come out of small teams who got buy-in and assistance from big technology companies and seldom from big tech going out to make things happen.

And, even better, you could tie it to the world of filmmaking at the time.

The auteur theory of filmmaking is pretty simple: the director is the author of the film, and that the director's vision is enough. All other parts of the filmmaking process are bent to the will of the director. That's actually not a perfect description, but it's perfect enough for this application. There are actually deep legal connections, at least in the European Union, tied in with it all. So anyhow, Pi, and most of Aronofsky's works, are deeply tied to Aronofsky himself, his fingerprints are all over his movies, and none so much as Pi. The reason? Well, he didn't have anyone else's opinions in mind. He got the money, he made the movie he was going to make, and it turned out to be one of the most brain-enhanced films of the decade. Aronofsky is Max, and the producers of films like Armageddon, Deep Impact and Godzilla were in control of their productions until the guidance of a study and all of that was holding the director's vision in check. Pi basically says "the small is better than the large' both in and out of the formalist concept of the film.

The film was shot in black & white, which gives it a very particular imagery. I think, though I'm not 100% sure, that by 1997 or so, the price for b&w reversal film was higher than that of regular color Kodak film. I want to say that was one of the things that happened a few years after Clerks. In this case, the black and white is playing off the concept that we're sure what to believe from Max. There is no great cinematographical trickery, it's shot pretty straight forward, but we're not in the world that we live in. By 1998, a black & white world was so foreign that it made viewers uncomfortable. Kevin Smith used B&W because he could afford it, but it also fit in as the concept of security camera foot-

age. Schindler's List was shot B&W, but that was Spielberg being a jackass as that film would have worked beautifully in color of black and white. The more recent B+W explosion, with great SF films like The Ghastly Love of Johnny X and Shuffle, use the cinematography to great effect, and I'd argue that Shuffle is strongly tied to the vision and imagery of Pi. You can see the threads of influence upon Aronofsky here as well, particularly in the form of The Elephant Man. While there are certainly thematic ties, the best tie is in the use of black and white to achieve mood and to make the audience uncomfortable. Lynch is a master of setting the audience at a table of unease, and Aronofsky is influenced by none so much as Lynch.

The best part of Pi is that it is without question a science fiction film and so few would endeavor to call it such. There's a computer that has powers beyond what we know today. There's a character who is basically der Uber-mensch. There's a level of teechnology that is not known to us. Mot importantly, it's built around human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution, which would not have happened at all without its scientific content. That's Theodore Sturgeon's definition of science fiction, so that's good enough for me.

There was a serious wave of science fiction that took a more subtle route. You can draw a line from Pi to films like Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind or Genius & Madness (a fine film I wrote about in 2005 in an early Drink Tank and which feels so closely tied that it may as well) and the more serious, adult science fiction strain we've been seeing in film festival line-ups certainly comes from Pi. There's always

been top-notch, thoughtful adult science fiction, but for the mainstream of cinema, it's seldom been brought to the front. This was a pretty darn mainstream film, Art House, yes, but between Pulp Fiction and Kill Bill, Art House was pretty Mainstream. This was one of the most original visions of the 1990s, and it showed a lot of what we'd be seeign in the next decade. This, along with our next 52 Weeks entry, The Iron Giant, show a lot of what would make up early 21st Century science fiction.

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AND NOW, MR. JOHN PURCELL!

Well, that's a bit of serendipity: take this issue's number and multiply the first two digits to get the third digit. Impressive. *wheeze* Most impressive.

Aren't those called Amicable numbers, or somthing like tha!

This is gonna be one quick loc since I have a class in a few minutes to teach, so here goes:

We'll see abou that!

I totally love The Fifth Element. It is simply a FABULOUS (say that with a swish in your voice) movie that is simply a lot of fun both visually and plot-wise. To me, Chris Tucker steals the movie with his over the top role. He obviously had a lot of fun doing it. There's also a more serious side to this film that's hidden under the wealth of special effects and action scenes, and that is the role of the individual in society, how we're forced to conform to a certain behavioral pattern and position in the world society. Then there's the obvious environmental message. Overall, though, this movie remains one of my favorite science fiction movies.

I've been a big fan of it for ages and there's a lot of layers to it, which is a great sign for any film!

I'd like to really sink my teeth into the comments about ChiCon 7, so I think I'll take a break for now - go teach my class, that is - then come back to write an addendum loc that addresses your commentary about how fractionalized and insular WorldCon and fandom have become. This topic definitely needs more attention and is worth discussing. Until then, here's the first part of this loc.

It's OK, We'll wait...

Okay, I am back.

And I notice that 3 x 2 still = 6. Consistency helps.

At least one thing in The Drink Tank has some consistancy...

So Chris Barkley made some very interesting comments about ChiCon 7, and it doesn't surprise me that I agree with much of what he said. While an attendance estimated at between 5000 and 5500 is small compared to the mammoth crowds at DragonCon (held over the same weekend) or ComicCon San Diego, those two media events are large focused on exactly that: media events. As he noted, the attendance level at WorldCon has for the most part stagnated. Case in point: the two WorldCons I attended (MidAmeriCon in 1976, and IguanaCon 1978) both registered in the mid-4000 range, so over the 34-36 years since then, to see a centrally located WorldCon like Chicago only draw a thousand more attendees definitely signifies a stagnation in numbers, while those who do attend the World SF Convention are definitely graying. Plus, a great number of fans have passed on to the Great Consuite in the Sky while new, younger fans are not entering the fold at the rate they did during the 1970s and through the mid 1980s. Yes, I agree: active SF fandom as we know it has definitely leveled off.

The thing is between 1980 and 1996 (roughly) we were bigger, I think we averaged about 2500 more attendees between those years and that we have since.

His other observation - "The divide between the various fan groups and Worldcon attendees has grown wider than ever over the past decade" - is a sad development. The fandom that

I entered was open and inviting, offering an opportunity for me to find my niche within its folds. Besides having a large local club (Minn-stf) to be active in, there were some conventions inside a one-day's drive from Minneapolis. Nowadays, there are so many subfandoms that it is easy for a new "science fiction" fan to wander in and never come close to the core of what formed traditional sf fandom. It saddens me to hear that fans act rude to each other, even acting exclusionary to neo fans who might have otherwise become really good fannish fans (for lack of a better definition of what we are). I don't mind that young fans have different interests from mine, but then again, in recent years I have discovered some fun genres, such as Steampunk, Alternative History, and even Supernatural Romance. The works of Joe Lansdale belong in some kind of slasher-punk-mystery or Gothic-Western genre mashup, and it's all good stuff, too. If anything, maybe us Old Phart Phans need to remember how open-minded we were back in the day when we were young and full of energy, wanting to see this, do that, try whatever-the-hell THAT is, and so on.
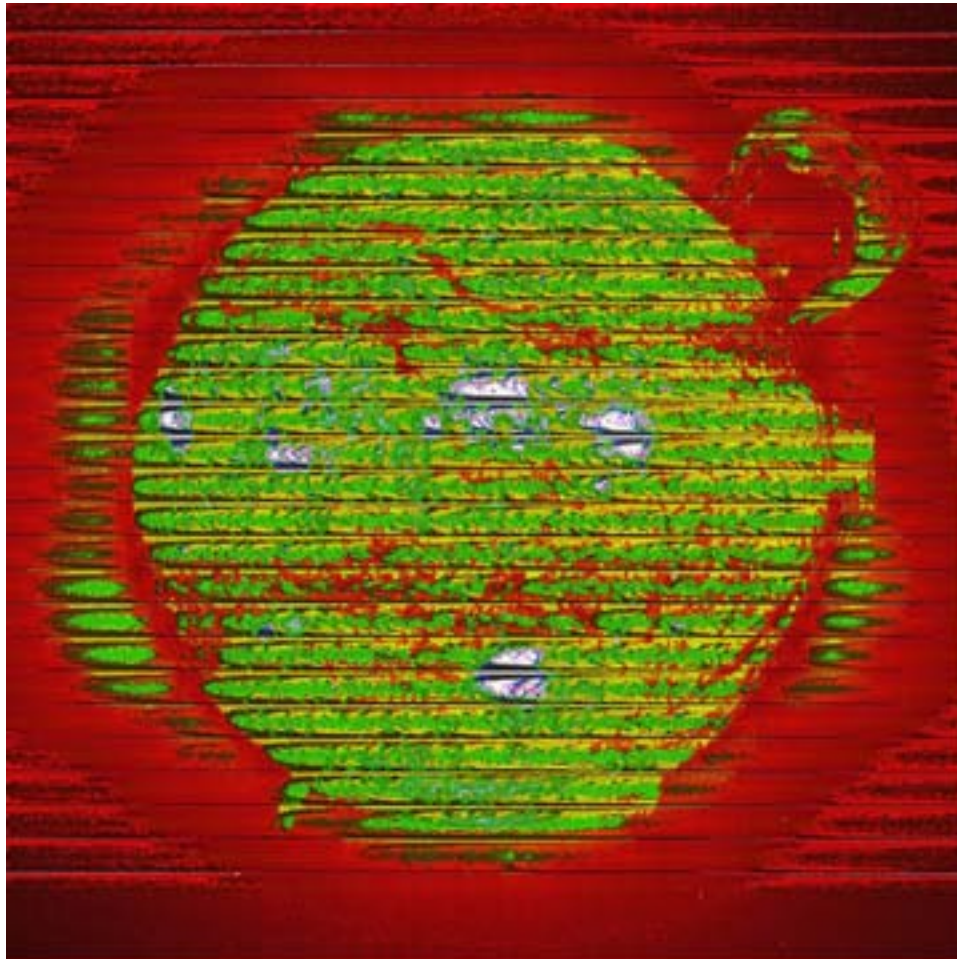
Seems as if we've forgotten our youthful ways. *sigh* I may be 58 now, coming up on my 40th anniversary of discovering fandom, but I don't feel like an old phart. It's all in our perspectives of how we see others as we used to be.

I believe that Neos are our future! Seriously, there've been times when it's been almost impossible to bring together old groups and the new. Then again, there's a lot of great cross-overs. There are a big series of things that work. For example, **sometimes we'll see things like Steampunk groups popping up within an established convention and they end up bringing people into both folks. We've caught some great folks to BayCon who first encountered it through one of the costuming groups that had a meet-up. It might not happen everywhere, but it does happen, and the more open we are to that happening, we're gonna have to be as open as we can.**

Hope that makes sense. It does to me, but I wrote that batch of drivel, so it reflects my frame of mind about fandom right now. Like I wrote in the latest issue of my fanzine (Askance #27, Summer 2012), what we could call Science Fiction Fandom At Large is frigging huge, and fanzine fandom is but one small corner of that fannish universe. Sometimes I like the other vortexes of fan activity swirling around, but I still come back to what I enjoy the most: fanzines.

Fandom is both huge and insular. It's a bunch of islands in the same archipeligo. I had a wake-up call recently. Fanzine fandom is a small part of the fandom we know that goes to cons, maybe 1% or less. Apparently, Convention-going fandom is 1 or 2% of On-line Fandom that participates on the blogs and so on. That's roughly 3 to 5% of the total SF Reading population. And that is roughly 5 to 10% of the SF Movie audience.!

With that, I bid adieu. Many thanks for a thoughtful issue.
All the best,
John Purcell

THE SUN!*(&*#@!#& IS GLITCHED*(@#$&$*(PO by Steve Mix