



Ray X X-Rayer

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An image from the first Fantastic Four movie, the never-released-to-the-public low budget 1994 version by Roger Corman. Despite its great flaws it got the FF basics right. And unlike the three that followed it, this movie is entertaining (in its own way.)

Diversity Or Cynical Capitalism?

I won't waste time writing a disparaging review of the latest Fantastic Four movie (2005). I wasted enough time watching it.

Instead I want to focus on one controversy that erupted before the movie was released. The FF are a superhero family even though only two of them are related by blood. Susan Storm (Invisible Woman) and Johnny Storm (Human Torch) are brother and sister, blond-haired Caucasians.

For the 2005 FF movie it was decided to make Johnny Storm black. No problem there per se; in this new version Susan was adopted by Johnny's father.

But why was this change made?

Over the years I've heard many cynical stories about dumb decisions made by movie studio executives. There's the story of a Superman fan turned author trying to pitch a script for a movie about his comic book idol. During his discussion with an exec with thumbs-up-or-down power the author mentioned the name "Kal-El" a few times.

The exec asks: Who is this Kal-El you're talking about?

But it's not just superhero movies. The first film version of the Poseidon Adventure (2005) was a big hit, raking in tons of money. Studio execs -- for humanitarian reasons, of course -- wanted to make a sequel. They approached one of the original movie's stars, Gene Hackman, to be in the sequel.

Gene Hackman asked the execs: How can I return? My character died in the first film.

Simple, replied the execs. The survivors of the Poseidon disaster are lifted by helicopter from the wrecked ship to terra firma. When they debark Gene would run up and say: "What happened to my twin brother?"

I wonder regarding the recent Fantastic Four film disaster what the studio execs were thinking when trying to fix the unbroken FF concept. Two baby-faced barely-weaned studio executives hold a private meeting. Before they got their jobs via nepotism they had worked the line in a sausage factory, an appropriate background for their present roles. Neither one reads books, even comic books, because reading hurts their brains.

Maybe the meeting went down something like the following.

* * *

EXEC #1: The survey came in. There's money to be made by appealing to black viewers.

EXEC #2: That survey was done by the same company that said a majority of consumers preferred new Coke over Classic, right?

EXEC #1: Yes, I heard they do great work. Anyway we got to make one of the FF black to draw in those extra bucks.

EXEC #2: How about the Thing?

EXEC #1: He's orange. If we make him black it'll screw up the trademark and the toy line. According to a survey people like orange. It's a sunny happy color.

EXEC #2: How about the Human Torch? He'll still be red when he's on fire.

EXEC #1: OK, that could work.

EXEC #2: I got a brilliant idea. The Human Torch says "Flame on!" when he goes into action. But we could give him a better cry, one more edgy.

EXEC #1: Such as...

EXEC #2: A great slogan I heard about from the 1960s. "Burn, Baby, Burn!"

EXEC #1: Yeah, that sounds sexy. More so than that stupid "Flame on." No controversy there.

* * *

Then the execs move to another topic, discussing a survey claiming there is great profit potential in appealing to old Jewish movie goers. Ergo, Woody Allen as Conan the Barbarian.

Whatever the execs really decided about the FF I doubt promoting diversity was at the top of their list.

Diversity should be genuine, not part of a greedy marketing ploy.

* * *

Don't Fokr Closed Captioning

Yes, I'm still using steam engine technology, a VCR. And until my budget situation changes I'm stuck with videotape for recording TV programs.

But the VCR includes closed captioning which can be activated. My hearing is a bit off. Instead of blasting the audio from cult movies, disturbing other renters around me, I hit CC and follow the story that way.

But note it's hard to understand what is happening with the captioning is nothing but garbled nonsense. "Godzilla is stomping Tokyo" becomes "gxR metyT ghhu."

So I'm watching "Godzilla and Mothra: The Battle For Earth" (1992) and when I switch on CC it's the worse indecipherable crap I've ever seen. For example check out this image from the movie:



Of course all the ads are OK, perfect captioning. But I don't think a G-Fan with a hearing impairment wants to know about the latest douche product as opposed to following the movie's plot. Why bother to caption when all you provide is meaningless text? Enough of this fokring around.

* * *

MailboX

Dave Haren (tyrbolo@comcast.net) responded to RX XR #115. He observed:

Hi Ray,

I noticed a lot of angels in church. I hadn't gone much but happened to look around and noticed the meanest kids out of church were quite angelic there. If we could lock those angels in church on a permanent basis we'd have the promised millennium in a week.

I knew a fake UFO joker but his best gag was to fertilize a friends corner lot lawn slope with a four letter word using a big bag with holes in the narrow end. It was invisible until watered. When the victim noticed it, he decided fertilizing the whole lawn area would remove the offense. That made it really stand out. The victim had to plow the whole section of lawn under to save the neighbors from his giant obscenity.

I hear some kid had the police called when he tried to buy school lunch with a 2 dollar bill. Now that's a level of sheer genius that means the system is in terminal failure mode. Like Gandhi said when asked about western civilization. "That would be a good idea." Same goes for education.

I know the Goddess loves us, because someone had to put all this discord here and she is the likeliest candidate.

I'm looking forward to the next Askance. I sent in a diatribe that wasn't exactly in tune with the mainstream thought modality. At least it wasn't heinleinian futanarian theorizing, that has moved over to Rectors zine.

The pic this time is a still from a Mexican SF epic.

Til next ish.



< **Ship of Monsters**

RX: Regarding your comments about Askance and Rectors. Through efanazines.com I'm getting acquainted with more people in SF zinedom. Previously my zine and blog contacts were people into conspiracy theories, fringe beliefs and UFOs. So I'm unaware of the disagreements and feuds in SFdom. I did read something about puppies of the sad and rabid kind... (Time for Prozac and vaccinations.)

* * *

And Dave followed up with more observations after reading RX XR #116:

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Having been around less gifted types in my chequered youth I doubt the ability of any medium to make them more racist or less prone to stereotypings. My experience is that the adults around them were quite capable of feeding them horrible disinformation at a prodigious rate. Trust me there was no visible sign of sanity among the adults of that time, therefore any assumption that comics were to blame for the ills of any time is sheer projection.

Man, when Sputnik flew overhead they pulled out all the stops. The nuts were on the lawn every night scanning the skies for the monstrous Russian bombers. The intelligence community had recruited one of the NSDAP who had a string of mystical Tsarist looneys who reported on what the Rus were up to and we as a government believed it no matter how ludicrous it was. Eventually the Skunk Works (Area 51) built the equipment needed to take a real look at the rus capacity. That suddenly evaporated the monstrous Russian bomber fleets in a puff of reality. Of course by that time the military industrial boys were on to a good way to gobble up the tax base and it became the missile gap we were behind in.

Now with the average Moslem eager to sweep all before him in a burst of zeal it is necessary to bomb anything brown and then build a wall to keep them out of our wonderful country. As long as Lockheed Martin can sell bombs, enemies will be everywhere.

Better check under the bed, the Mayor of London might be plotting there. : ^).

There seems to be a wide spectrum of folks who can't wait to get back to the good old days, debtors prisons, torture, revocation of enlightenment values of human worth and common decency, coupled with religious fanaticism and the joys of enjoying watching others suffer (the last being one of the benefits of christian heaven, you can watch hell like it was TV). With that kind of thing peddled as true by the adults a few comics aren't going to warp the children much.

Anyway keep on raising the bar, it makes the RpubliCrats hop like a flea.

RX: After the shock from Sputnik the big push was on for "More science in the schools!" Nowadays it's "STEM: Science! Technology! Engineering! Math!" Once again too many students will be trained for too few jobs, especially with the outsourcing option by greedy CEOs.

During the so-called 1960s missile gap the government built a number of underground launch silos near the Canadian border in New York State, the region where I live. Most of those silos are abandoned, flooded, but one in my neck of the woods was converted into an underground home. When the missile silos were in operation this region was hosting nukes at those sites and at the now-defunct Plattsburgh Air Force Base. Plenty of atomic weapons to increase the chance of a mistake. We had to worry about mushroom clouds from both sides during the Cold War.

The missile silos in this region were declared obsolete after two years. (I think they were obsolete from day one.) All were torn apart and hauled away. Of course that project didn't add to the national debt, eh?

* * *

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Lloyd Penney (penneys@bell.net) commented:

Dear Ray:

I am having a few computer problems, so I do not know if I have the newest issue of X-Rayer, but I do have issue 115, so I will go with that. I am typing this up on an old laptop, with the big computer in the shop.

Bell & Howell is an old trade name, but I see it on other kinds of photographic equipment, and non-photo stuff, too. It's just like I see the trade name Betty Crocker, but not just on cake mixes, but also on kitchen appliances. I guess these old trademarks are quite recognizable, and therefore salable to other companies to use.

Alien abductions, alien sex...sometimes, we suspend our disbelief further than we should. If only something would happen that would say yea or nay to this... To be honest, I hate to be a skeptic. Strange stories often come from personal observations.

The job hunt continues to continue, and there's been few nibbles. The only thing that might save me now is a lottery win. Fingers crossed something good happens soon.

With that, I must sign off, and get this to you asap. Take care, see you with the next one.

RX: Computer issues? That's my middle name.

I've also noticed traditional American brand names being slapped on cheap non-American electronics made in China or elsewhere. Just using the reputation of the name to pass off inferior electronics. Years ago I heard about an old couple that told a electronics shop owner that his prices were too high. They said they bought Emerson before (probably in the 1940s) and so they left to waste money on a POS. They probably thought they were getting a good deal through brand loyalty to a "Made In America" product.

And then there's my favorite use of crossbanding, Gerber Baby Insurance. What they know about making baby food can be applied to insurance. And a baby does need insurance, especially to support the wife and children he leaves behind.

Good luck with the job hunt. I've been there, ten applications in one week, but that's before I retired in semi-penury.

-- END XR #117 --