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This edition was edited by **Stephanie Hanna** and **Mark Ambrogio**.

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## Domain Names and Why They Matter

**Editors' Note:** *Recently, Science Fiction London renewed its domain name. We thought folks might be interested to know the history of the club's domain name, why we have a domain name, and some information on domain names in general. Thanks to Reinhardt (our webmaster) for putting together this article!*

A domain name is essentially a string of letters that tells someone where to go to find a given website. It is *not* an actual address in the same way 251 Dundas Street, London, Ontario is, but it *is* a unique identifier that can be looked up by your computer to determine the actual address. Just as we typically say "the Library" to refer to the London Public Library, Central Branch, <http://sflondon.ca> is a short, human-friendly way to refer to the Science Fiction London website.

Domain names are convenient ways to refer to a website so that people don't have to try to memorize the real address for a site, which typically looks something like <http://138.71.29.118>: that is clearly not very easy to remember. Worse, having to know the "real" address, which is actually called an IP address – short for Internet Protocol address – before you can access a website becomes problematic if the IP address changes, which is something that can and often does happen, often in as little as a few hours. Imagine having to memorize an IP address and then relearn an entirely new one every few hours! I'm sure you'll agree that this would not be desirable or convenient.

Science Fiction London has had a website since 1997. Initially, we had no domain name of our own and used the URL of the hosting service that held the website. At one point, that was James J's (a long-standing member and past-president) personal web space, which came with his internet service; then, it was my web space; then, it was a third party web space that forced ads onto each page. Each time we moved our web pages, the entire URL, including the domain name, would change. After one particularly unfortunate occurrence, we lost our website altogether for a few months when the computer holding it was temporarily unavailable. Finally, we found space on a hosting service that was free and didn't force us to put ads on the pages. I also learned that if we had our own domain name, we'd never have to learn a new domain name again!

So, after persuading the club that this was a worthwhile expenditure, we obtained our first domain name. We chose sfl.london.on.ca to conform to the standards set up by the body that governed domain names in Canada and used that for many years. Then, as the standards evolved, we changed our domain name to sflondon.ca. I expect we'll retain that name for many years to come, assuming we agree that the website is worth keeping.

*~ Reinhardt Christiansen*

## In Space, No One Can Hear You ... Glam-Rock?

### ***Space Opera*, a novel**

Catherynne M. Valente, author  
Saga Press, 2018

This year brought readers a brilliantly fun new novel from Catherynne M. Valente, an author many will likely know from her previous works, including *Radiance* (2015), *Deathless* (2011), *The Girl Who Circumnavigated Fairyland in a Ship of Her Own Making* (2011), and *In the Night Garden* (2006). If you enjoyed her earlier work, then her new novel, *Space Opera*, which was released in April, is likely already on your radar. If you happen to be new to her work and enjoy comic science fiction, consider giving this one a try – especially if you're looking for a good laugh. Inspired by the Eurovision Song Contest, and influenced by the comedic style of Douglas Adams, Valente's new novel offers a world that's charming, ridiculous, and an awful lot of fun.

The book follows the trials and tribulations of Decibel Jones, the inventor of the electro-funk glamgrind genre and the former lead singer of the band the Absolute Zeros. Jones finds himself, fifteen years after his time in the spotlight, living a rather less-fabulous life as a washed-up former rock star. With his band defunct and his three solo albums having failed, he's broke and has no real plan. Jones, though, is about to be thrust back into the spotlight. Earth has been invaded, humans have learned that they're not alone in the universe, and Decibel Jones has learned that he and the Absolute Zeros have themselves a new gig, on a bigger stage than they'd ever imagined: the Metagalactic Grand Prix.

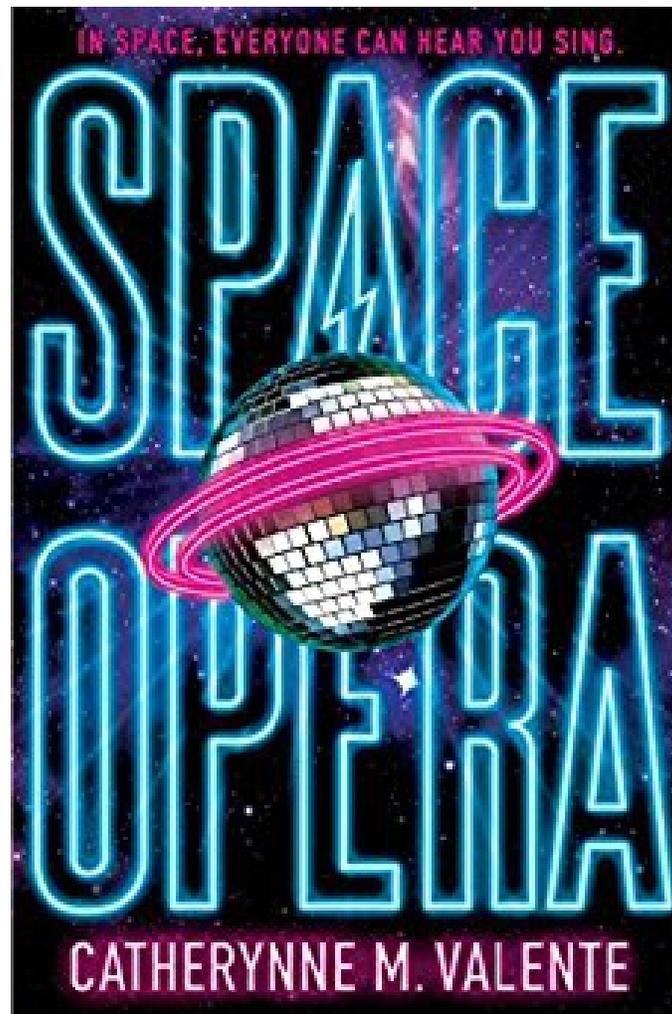
Following the intergalactic Sentience Wars, a conflict that involved a hundred thousand worlds and an almost unimaginable level of destruction, the shattered survivors had settled on a new way of resolving their disputes: less raining down of fiery death upon their enemies; more high-stakes musical battle royal. Now, the Grand Prix is held every Standard Alunizar Year. Sentient and sentience-aspiring species send their best musicians, scope out the competition, put on their best performance, and see who can really bring the house (or the galaxy) down. For Decibel Jones and the Absolute Zeros, Earth's chosen Grand Prix competitors, the stakes are clear: perform well, and the human race gets welcomed into the club; lose, and humanity gets precision-incinerated from orbit. So, no pressure.

Frequently funny and occasionally touching, *Space Opera* blends a quirky sense of humour, fantastic creativity, and wry observations about life in a way that genuinely hooked me. The novel is full of phrases and paragraphs that twist and turn, and sometimes end up in unexpected places. Take, for example, the first rule of the Grand Prix:

The Grand Prix shall occur once per standard Alunizar Year, which is hereby defined by how long it takes Aluno Secundus to drag its business around its morbidly obese star, get tired, have a nap, wake up cranky, yell at everyone for existing, turn around, go back around the other way, get lost, start crying, feel sorry for itself and give up on the whole business, and finally try to finish the rest of its orbit all in one go the night before it's due, which is to say, far longer than a year by almost anyone else's annoyed wristwatch.

I suspect this style is a "love it or hate it" sort of thing, and I definitely came down on the "love it" side. In fact, I came down on the "love it a lot" side. If you're looking for a laugh, and enjoy a bit of snark and comedy mixed in with your spaceships and alien life forms, then *Space Opera* might be just what you're looking for. It's fun, funny, and weird – and if that sounds like it might be your niche, then this book is well-worth checking out.

~ *Stephanie Hanna*



## What Science Fiction have you been missing on TV?

SF has been a part of TV for a very long time, probably almost as long as TV itself has been available. One of the challenges is keeping up with all the new SF that is available so that you can see which shows appeal to you.

There are a few SF shows that you may not have seen yet and a few others you may never have heard of, so I want to take this opportunity to tell you about some of those. I'll tell you a little bit about several different shows that I have seen that I think you *may* like.

### ***Humans***

There are two versions of the *Humans* TV series. The first is a Swedish series called *Real Humans*. I've never seen *Real Humans*, but it was the inspiration for the British series called *Humans*. *Humans* is set in England in the very-near future and shows us a world where robots – called "synths" in the series – have become increasingly life-like and human-looking. Families buy synths like they buy refrigerators or TVs: they are essentially appliances, but appliances that look very close to human, aside from their vivid green eyes. Over the course of the first season, we see a few of those synths apparently become self-aware and start to have emotions. Then, they begin to reach out to the other sentient synths. In later seasons, this sentience expands dramatically with profound implications for society as questions are raised as to whether these newly-sentient beings should have rights or whether the sentient synths are simply broken and need to be repaired – or discarded.

I find the political questions the most interesting parts of the show: who qualifies for rights (and why) and how should that be decided? Indirectly, it should make any viewer question what it is to be human in the first place.

*Humans* consists of three seasons of eight episodes each (so far); each episode is an hour long. The first two seasons of *Humans* are available on DVD and BluRay at Amazon.ca (and presumably other sites and stores); the third season has only just aired, so the disk should be out soon.



## ***Killjoys***

*Killjoys* is a rollicking action-adventure series set in a far-distant future in a solar system called the Quad. The three lead characters, Dutch, John, and D'avin, are "reclamation agents" – bounty hunters – that track down people who have contracts on them. Their universe is a rather dark and dystopian place and, on top of fulfilling their contracts, our heroes also have to deal with an overarching plot involving green goo that threatens everything they hold dear.

Although I am not very fond of dystopias as a rule, *Killjoys* manages to sustain my interest, probably because the show moves along fairly briskly and has some interesting technology, including a spaceship that reminds me of Dora in Heinlein's *Time Enough for Love*.

This series has aired on both SyFy in the US and Space here in Canada. When completed, the series will consist of five seasons of 10 episodes each. Each episode is an hour long. Four of the five seasons have already aired with the fifth set to air next summer. The first three seasons are all available on DVD and BluRay; the fourth season only just aired, so you should probably expect the disks in the near future.

## ***Into the Badlands***

Imagine a post-apocalyptic world in which most of what remains of civilization is a feudal society run by barons competing for power and making their incomes largely from growing poppies. It's a violent world where the barons use "clippers" – assassins highly trained in martial arts – to act against their enemies. Firearms are unknown and swords, crossbows, and knives are the weapons of choice. Despite the chaos of this world, there are people trying to establish order and bring about a better future, despite the challenges.



Daniel Wu as 'Sunny.' *Into the Badlands*, Season 3. Credit: Alan Clarke/AMC

If you're interested in a story that seems heavily influenced by classic Chinese and Japanese stories and martial arts, you may find that *Into the Badlands* suits you very well. I find the martial arts scenes very exciting, although a black belt of my acquaintance – our own Terry B! -- tells me the fight scenes are not terribly realistic. The main character, Sonny, played by real-life martial artist Daniel Wu, is sympathetic, as are the other characters who are trying to build a better world. Bajie, a sidekick of sorts, was added in the second season; he is played by British actor Nick Frost.

The first season of the series was just six episodes while the second season was 10 episodes. The third season will be 16 episodes long but be shown in two batches of eight episodes each; the first batch aired recently and the rest of season three will air in a few months. The first two seasons are available on DVD and BluRay; I expect the third season won't be available until all of it has aired.

### ***Disenchantment***

*Disenchantment* is *not* Science Fiction and may not even qualify as Fantasy, depending on your definition. But it *is* fun and its creator, Matt Groening, who also created *The Simpsons* and *Futurama*, may be all you need to know to want to give this a try. *Disenchantment* is the (animated) story of a young princess named Bean living in a kingdom called Dreamland. Bean is not your typical fairy-tale princess; she has a bit of a reputation for being a drunkard, cheats at cards, and is reluctant to be married off to help her kingdom's political prospects. Her best friends are a naive elf named Elfo who pines for her romantically, and her personal demon Luci (short for Lucifer) who is constantly trying to tempt her to do the wrong thing. Just as in other Groening productions, whimsy and reality often combine in humorous ways. For instance, an early scene in the pilot shows a dying man on a plague cart offering Bean best wishes on her imminent wedding. There's also an overarching plot about two people who mean to control Dreamland from afar to tie the series together.

I'm not normally a fan of fairy tales, but I enjoyed this and look forward to seeing more of *Disenchantment* beyond the current season.

The first season of this show, which consists of 10 half-hour episodes, was recently released on Netflix. I don't know if a DVD or BluRay release is forthcoming.

~ Reinhardt Christiansen

# From Printed Story to the Hollywood Dream Factory: *The Day The Earth Stood Still*

## ***Farewell to the Master*, a short story**

Harry Bates, author

*Astounding Stories*, 1940

## ***The Day The Earth Stood Still*, a film**

Robert Wise, director

Twentieth-Century Fox, 1951

This series, describing the leap from a (possibly) little-known classic on the printed page to celluloid, whether faithful or not, continues here with the short story *Farewell to the Master*. It was subsequently made into the classic movie *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

*Farewell to the Master*, written by Harry Bates, appeared in 1940 in the publication *Astounding Stories*. It was very loosely adapted to the classic *The Day the Earth Stood Still* in 1951 and, subsequently, into another version (not a sequel) in 2008.

Bates' story did not make a huge impact on the literary world at the time, when the science fiction genre dealt with malevolent aliens bent on conquering the world (Question: so what is so special about our planet that a wide range of aliens come here in hordes to conquer us?). In *this* narrative, though, it is humans that are the unfriendly, violent race.

The story begins three months after the alien ship appears. The ship stayed immobile for two days before Klaatu emerged "god-like in appearance and in human form." Klaatu is shot and killed almost immediately after he exits the space ship by a person the police found to be "mentally unbalanced." The humans exhibit extreme fear of the alien presence. There is very little in the way of awe or wonder, except by the main character, a journalist named Cliff, but the transformation of Cliff's feelings occurs about two-thirds of the way into the story. In defense of the human fear, there is very little that the alien does to alleviate it because Klaatu communicates so little. The only positive message presented by Klaatu was when, on first leaving the ship, he raised his right hand in the "universal gesture of peace" immediately before he was shot and killed.

The major differences between the story and the 1951 film are:

- Bates has the alien ship suddenly appearing out of thin air whereas the movie has the aliens landing in a flying saucer.
- The story names the robot 'Gnut'; in the movie, it is 'Gort'.
- Bates places the time in a distant, unspecified future where the solar system is populated.
- 2008's Gort is an acronym for Genetically Organized Robotic Technology.

*Farewell to the Master* begins with the spaceship already in place for three months. It has been cordoned off for scientific investigation and, to a limited extent, segregated for

tourism. Much of action takes place at night within the confines of the barricade, mainly restricting itself to the journalists attempt to investigate the activities of Gnut when it is not observed overnight. Gnut becomes mobile and a lot happens during these nighttime hours. During this time, Gnut and Cliff develop a trust with each other.

The intent of the alien visit is vague in the story but each movie adaptation generates its own position:

- The 1951 version targets human aggressiveness which may potentially impact civilizations beyond the earth with its development of nuclear weapons. This was a reflection of the post-WWII increase of Soviet-U.S. conflict and paranoia.
- The 2008 version takes issue with the environmental damage caused by the human race. Obviously, this reflects recent and present day environmental concerns.

In the 1951 film, the alien warning was severe: if humanity refused to mend its destructive ways, the entire planet would be "reduced to a burned out cinder." This is certainly an extreme response to human hostility, because not only the human race but also all animal and vegetable life would be obliterated as well. The solution in the 2008 movie would simply be to eliminate the human race in order to preserve all other life on the planet.

Of interest is the fact that, in 1995, the U.S. National Film Registry selected the 1951 movie as "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant."

~ Ron Trautmann



## Joseph Campbell & Science Fiction

Most of Science Fiction London's (SFL) monthly library meetings are assigned to specific novels, or to a specific film or TV series, usually with the whole meeting being devoted to that specific topic. Occasionally, though, SFL will discuss more of a general theme, rather than a specific text – often, themes that recur in SF and are of genre-wide significance. In instances such as these, the meeting will be devoted to discussing various aspects of that theme from more of a "birds-eye view," rather than delving into details of one specific novel (the plot, the characters, etc). Some examples of past theme meetings include:

- "Defining Science Fiction" – May, 1981
- "Aliens in Science Fiction" – February, 1982
- "Post-Apocalyptic Fiction" – March of 1992
- "Artificial Intelligence" – April, 2005
- "The Implications of Self-Driving Cars" – January, 2016

For our July meeting, Doug M, Stephanie H, and I presented on **Joseph Campbell & Science Fiction**. This article encapsulates *some* of the material presented, with a view to answering the question, "What would a meeting on 'Joseph Campbell & Science Fiction' be about?"

### Who was Joseph Campbell?

Born in a suburb of New York City in 1904, Joseph Campbell initially studied biology and mathematics at Dartmouth College, but he decided that he preferred the humanities. Subsequently, Campbell received a BA in English Literature and a MA in Medieval Literature from Columbia University (in 1925 and 1927, respectively).

Although Campbell did further post-graduate work, studying languages at the University of Paris and the University of Munich, he did not complete his doctorate, opting instead to pursue independent reading and travel, befriending the famous author John Steinbeck along his travels. Ultimately, Campbell became a Professor of Literature at Sarah Lawrence College, a liberal arts institution in Westchester County, New York. It was at Sarah Lawrence College that Campbell met his wife, Jean Erdman (1916 –), who is famous in her own right, as a choreographer and theatre director.

In 1949, Campbell published his seminal work *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, for which he is most known. Retiring from teaching in 1972 (in retirement, Campbell moved to Hawaii), Campbell became a public intellectual, entering the public-lecture circuit and, ultimately, was interviewed by Bill Moyers for the PBS documentary *Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth*. This documentary was aired in 1988, a year after Campbell's death from cancer in 1987.

### What did Joseph Campbell say?

In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Campbell elucidates two important (for our purposes) aspects of mythology: its social significance and the concept of a Monomyth, otherwise known as The Hero's Journey.

An example of how Campbell understands the social significance of mythology may be seen in how he derides (what he sees as) the mistaken notion that ancient rituals around weather and the changes of season are intended to *change* the weather. Campbell describes that as erroneous, saying that "the dominant motive in all truly religious (as opposed to black-magical) ceremonial is that of submission to the inevitables of destiny." In other words, the myths and rituals are more concerned about conditioning the group ("the rites all prepare the community to endure," as Campbell puts it) to accept the inevitability of whatever nature brings their way (even though they may well vocalize a desire for rain, in dry times, etc), thereby cementing tangible social "connections." This is one example of how Campbell sees mythology providing a social function.

Campbell's thought is also well-known for his writing on the "call to adventure" that heroes in mythology encounter, in what is known as the Monomyth, or the Hero's Journey. In brief, the Hero's Journey has three broad stages: Departure, Initiation, and Return. As the term "Monomyth" implies, it is Campbell's belief that these stages are primordial and may be found in different cultures and in different times of human history.

### **What do other people say?**

During the presentation, reference was made to other authors who shared some of Campbell's thought – particularly those who shared his understanding of the social utility of mythology. Roy Rappaport (1926–1997), author of the posthumously-published *Ritual and Religion and the Making of Humanity* (published in 1999), describes much of the activity of our ordinary lives as "mundane time," with moments of ritual as the stepping outside of that mundanity (or into liminality). Like Campbell, Rappaport appreciates the social utility of ceremony (although Rappaport prefers the term "ritual") and his understanding of leaving "mundane time" has some correspondence to Campbell's understanding of the "call to adventure" and the Departure which that implies.

In 1969, William Labov (1927 –), with the assistance of his then-student, Joshua Waletzky, co-authored the seminal article *Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience*. In that article, Labov says that if one wants to understand the more "complex narratives," such as "myths, folk tales, legends, histories, [and] epics," such as Homer's *Iliad*, one must first understand the simpler narrative (story) that is often made a constituent in broader cultural texts: "In our opinion, it will not be possible to make very much progress in the analysis and understanding of these complex narratives until the simplest and most fundamental narrative structures are analyzed in direct connection with their originating functions."

Therefore, Labov (and Waletzky) proceeded to study story-telling in its simplest forms, the oral stories that we tell each other in our every-day lives, noting that many of these stories bore remarkable similarities and were often made to share a point.

Much of this was echoed by Barbara Johnstone, an American scholar of linguistics, in *Stories, Community, and Place* (from 1990), in which she studies American folk stories – many that would be considered "fantastical" (mythological). Johnstone identifies formulaic patterns of "Middle American" oral stories (similar to how Campbell noticed recurring patterns), finding that the person sharing the stories would (in telling the story) shift from the

past tense to the present at the story's "coda," or conclusion, making a point that has present-day applicability: "At the end of a story, the teller often summarizes it, or provides a kind of moral, underscoring the story's point, relating the story to the surrounding conversation, and bringing the hearer back out of the world of the story and into the present."

### Applicability to SF

It was noted how Campbell's thought was hugely influential upon George Lucas (1944 –), the creator of the *Star Wars* and *Indiana Jones* series (*Star Wars* has, after all, been described as contemporary mythology), and that there are numerous instances in SF where the pattern of the Monomyth appears. Another example is the film *The Matrix* (from 1999), in which Thomas Anderson, who works in a depressingly oppressive cubicle environment, experiences a very clear "call to adventure," as Campbell would put it, and undergoes the three stages of the Hero's Journey. As Rappaport would say, Anderson was called out of his "mundane time" (out of his work-a-day world), into a much more profound experience.

To borrow upon the ideas of Labov and Johnstone, the "truthfulness" of something like *The Matrix* is not contained in the details of the story, a story that is, after all, a work of fiction; rather, the "truthfulness" of the story is contained in its coda, or its moral. In other words, what is the story trying to tell us? And to the extent that a story like that may have a point, it is serving the social utility role that Campbell ascribes to mythology. During the presentation, Doug pointed out that Campbell elaborates on some of these themes in his 1968 work *Creative Mythology*.

Much of the discussion was focused on what ways SF novels and films may contain a "point" and may be "moral-heavy," with much of the discussion raising certain questions. Do we read (and watch) SF to be merely entertained? Or to learn about science? To what extent do we read SF to be challenged in our views, or to be challenged about how things *are*, instead being challenged to consider how things *could be*?

~ Mark C. Ambrogio



Joseph Campbell (right) in conversation with Bill Moyers

