

BORING MUNDANE STORIES!!

January 2016



Ordinary Stories – Everyday Crises – Ordinary People – The Usual Threats to Civilization – Same Old Aliens and Mythical Animals and Concealed Supernatural Horrors – Another Crank Theory

BORING MUNDANE STORIES © January 2016 by Garth Spencer. An amateur magazine by an amateur editor, featuring amateur fiction written amateurishly by amateurs. NOT INTENDED FOR SALE. For pdf copies, contact gartho@vcn.bc.ca or see <http://www.efanzines.com>. For future issues (if any interest is expressed), submit humorous, science fiction, fantasy or horror stories, articles, filksongs, fandom-centred poetry, or topical art to gartho@vcn.bc.ca.

Table of Contents

Editorial (Garth Spencer).....	1
Short Fiction.....	2
Close Encounters of the Fast-Talking Kind (Milton Keynes).....	2
Rajiv’s Fire Drill (Hrothgar Weems).....	4
Transaction Declined (Sherman Ochs).....	7
Candour (Hrothgar Weems).....	8
The Justice League of Samsara (Hrothgar Weems)	10
Serialized Novella	11
The Jade Ring (Jaroslav Schweik)	11
Science Fact, or something like it (Rajiv Witherspoon-Li).....	19
Letters	25
Reviews	25

Artist credits

Facebook	cover
The Unknown Photographer.....	1
Copyright-free art	1, 7, 8, 11, 19, 26

Copyright credits

- “Close Encounters of the Fast-Talking Kind” (previously published in *BCSFazine*, August & September 2004)
- “Rajiv’s Fire Drill” (previously published in *BCSFazine*, December 2004)
- “Transaction Declined” (previously published in *BCSFazine* in 2004)
- “Candour” (previously published in e-APA in 2015)
- “Justice League of Samsara” (previously published as “Justice League of Vancouver” in e-APA in 2015)
- “The Jade Ring” (previously serialized in BCAPA in the 1980s)

Editorial (Garth Spencer)



I made this!

As indicated in the colophon, this is in the nature of a (belated) Christmas present, or an (also belated) hobbit-type present I can give out, for my birthday this year. I have never been able to return to my family and friends all the support and hospitality they have given; but I can offer you all something I made myself - stories I wrote on several occasions, in several places. I hope it will amuse.

(Of course, if general *interest* actually develops, in an amateur SF/fantasy magazine featuring amateurish fiction by me, and eventually by other amateurs, I'll have to work up submission guidelines and all that stuff. Fortunately, I have done sporadic research on writers' markets, and have a little idea of what guidelines look like.)

You may notice that the stories seem to be set in British Columbia, but they name some unlikely communities; for one thing Spuzzum is placed on the coast, "beside the great, grey, greasy-green banks of the Fraser River, all hung about with cedar trees". You may also be amused, or confused, by the fact that characters in one story may be credited as the writers of others. One of the themes I want to develop is that the characters, the stories, and this magazine exist in an alternative British Columbia; also, *none of them is certain they stay in the same universe or timeline* from day to day.

Talking to some people, and how they plan their projects, can make you wonder what world you're in.

You may notice other themes as well, but I'll let you get on with this volume.



Short Fiction

Close Encounters of the Fast-Talking Kind (Milton Keynes)

Hrothgar Weems' world started coming unglued about the first time he lost a steady job, and had to work as an office temp. He was coming home from a very late, *very* stressful assignment, and was tired and sweaty and his cheap suit was rumpled, when he boarded his bus.

By the time he got off the bus, Hrothgar had finished re-reading the last pages of the *Illuminatus!* Trilogy the day before, and reading Philip K. Dick, which was turning out to be a downer. While he crossed an ill-lit, soggy soccer field, he still didn't pay attention to the aurora-like lights playing on the cloud cover.

It was rather hard to miss the vast metallic bulk, resembling nothing so much as a muffin the size of an apartment building, that swiftly blocked Hrothgar's path. Especially eye-catching was the shifting colour of the engines, going from white-and-pink through burnt umber to gunmetal grey. Hrothgar had a brief, startled impression of a bran muffin the size of an apartment complex, before the lights went out. His face went slack with astonishment.

A dimly-lit port opened before Hrothgar; a bulky robed figure trod out, and Hrothgar heard noises he couldn't identify. After a few heartbeats he realized the deep, hoarse sounds were something like English:

"... our conquest, you will obey us without question or complaint. We are the Dominies, and destined to rule ..."

The alien voice went on in this vein for several minutes, detailing the Dominies' military strength, and their policy toward resistance, and their general ideological attitude. *—This is a prepared speech*, Hrothgar realized. *They must make this announcement as a * legal * requirement, every place they show up.* Almost immediately, he also realized: *—They're enough like us to have a drive to dominance. Are they like us in other ways as well ...?*

Hrothgar waited politely, as he had been raised to do, then raised a hand when the Dominie stopped speaking. "Do you have some promotional literature?" he inquired.

The Dominie shifted a little. Presently it said, "What do you mean?"

"I mean, any government pretty much depends on the support of its population, not just their compliance. Also, we've never had a society that was completely united; a proposition like foreigners governing us is bound to polarize us, into your supporters and your opponents." Hrothgar was improvising rapidly as he spoke. "But you might simplify your work by setting up a political party, *advocating* for you, playing up the reasons to vote for Dominie administration."

The hard-to-grasp bulk of the Dominie shifted again. Hrothgar thought it might be puzzled. "Party? Support?"

"Yes. Most of our nations are representative republics," Hrothgar went on. "But most of them have problems right now with employment, or economic failure, or ecological trouble ... even mass hunger, and tribal wars. So you could advertise the benefits of administration by *experts*, and demonstrate your experience at allocating resources; maybe you could start by setting up organizations that mediate disputes on contract, or deploy your technologies on a patent-license basis." He paused. "We used to have some colonial and mercantile empires on this planet. Maybe that background could work for you?" He bit his tongue before saying it would work *against* the aliens.

A querulous-sounding alien said something from within the flying muffin. The robed Dominie turned slightly and barked something very brief. Then it turned its attention back to Hrothgar.

“I do not quite understand why we should take this trouble,” the alien said.

“How often have you lost lives and military materiel and industrial infrastructure to resistance groups?” Hrothgar asked. “And how often have they claimed that you had no *right* to their worlds, that no-one *asked* for your government? It might be a different matter on a world where a large constituency supported the Dominie, where some people actually *voted* for joining your empire.”

“AW, COME ON, BOSS,” a roar came from inside, “LET ME KILL SOMETHING!”

“Why kill?” Hrothgar asked interestedly.

“IT’S MY JOB! I DON’T GET MY REWARD UNTIL I KILL SOMETHING!” the voice bawled from inside the unidentified flying muffin. After a beat the same voice bellowed: “YOU A TARGET?”

“Never mind him,” the lumpy robed figure interrupted, “he is a subordinate under my orders. Now. Did I understand you to mean that we might *save* something by mounting a political, and not a military campaign? O child, the Ambassadors have been telling this tale to the Dominie High Council since your ancestors were using stone tools.”

“Ah,” said Hrothgar. He felt just as much out of his depth as he had arguing with his grandfather, about Japanese internment camps. “Have you any room to maneuver, I mean, any discretion about your program?”

“GIVE ME A TARGET, BOSS!”

“Not very much,” the Ambassador admitted.

“Maybe I have a solution,” Hrothgar said. “Please, allow me to speak to your excited subordinate.”

The Ambassador shuffled out of the portal and to one side. A larger, faster-moving figure now loomed out of the portal, and Hrothgar realized why it was hard to make sense of these figures. From the front they stood somewhat like men, but a protuberance or extension followed them ... in fact, they were centauroids. The bulky figure in body armour was easier to resolve when it stood two inches away and leaned into his face.

“READY TO FIGHT, MONKEY?”

“With what?” Hrothgar quavered.

The massive warrior looked him up and down disbelievingly. “WHAT?! NO WEAPONS?!”

“Not much use for them in this part of the world, at least in this city. But in other countries, it’s a different story ...”

“TELL ME WHERE !”

“Most of the tropical countries,” Hrothgar babbled, “much of the Southern Hemisphere, in fact anywhere that the industrialized nations extract their resources. That’s what we call the Third World.” Inspiration hit him. “In fact, if you want to be directed to countries that might *ask* for your military services, you might inquire at the United Nations.”

“United Nations?” the Ambassador said. “We wrote them off as another bureaucracy, less useful than most ...”

“Well, several bureaucracies,” said Hrothgar. “But they’re extremely good for several kinds of information. So is the State Department of the United States. So is the Central Intelligence Agency public website.”

“GOOD HUNTING?” said the warrior. Hrothgar finally realized the armour must conceal an audio amplifier.

“Excellent, in some places. I particularly recommend sub-Saharan Africa and some parts of South America,” Hrothgar babbled. “It often seems that local governments are deliberately trying to reduce their populations.”

“We were beginning to wonder about that,” said the Ambassador. He re-entered the portal. Pausing there, he turned to say, “Thank you for your helpful advice. Farewell.”

The warrior re-entered after him, and also paused. Assuming a present-arms stance, he announced, “You fought formidably, without weapons, and deflected a threat without even violence. We shall honour your cunning and vigilance, when we meet your con-specifics. Honour and glory to you, and victory if you deserve it!” The portal closed on him.

Hrothgar watched the multicoloured alien muffin weave drunkenly across the sky, realizing that the faint aroma the Dominie left behind reminded him of horse stables.

He never heard of the Dominie again for a very long time.

(previously published in *BCSFazine*, August & September 2004)

**THE ANARCHO-SURREALIST PARTY
WANTS YOU!**

If national governments are riddled with flaws, maybe we need to invent the world’s first functioning anarchist country! Maybe we can convert government services into Social Service Providers, and drive down their subscriptions with fair competition! Maybe we can invest in homeless and unemployed people building northern communities! Maybe we can issue independent currencies and recognize sasquatches as equal citizens! Or maybe *you* have even more creative ideas?

COME to our next meeting at a café near you! HEAR members describe their harrowing confrontations with online humorists, like the Royal Swiss Navy, and obstructionists like Monsanto and the Putin administration!

Contact gartho(at)vcn.bc.ca and start your adventure today!

[Rajiv’s Fire Drill \(Hrothgar Weems\)](#)

Rajiv Witherspoon-Li was preoccupied one evening with abducting domestic cats and dogs for the less scrupulous pharmaceutical labs, so at first he did not realize someone was trying to kill him.

“Pss, pss, pss, pss.” He twiddled his outstretched fingers invitingly. The overstuffed Persian watched him from the unlit backyard, and didn’t approach. “Hello, puss, puss. Puss-y! Want to say hello?” Rajiv tried to look dumb and innocent and harmless, which was how he usually evaded trouble, but the cat evidently wasn’t buying it. “Maauw?” Rajiv said in falsetto. That didn’t work either.

Rajiv was squatting, rather than kneeling, and now he lost his balance; his ass smacked the broken alley pavement and he went “Oof.” At that moment something went V-W-W-I-I-P past his forehead, right through the space his head had occupied. Rajiv flailed his hand around, trying to brush away what he

thought was a mosquito. He didn’t see or hear the hole that appeared in the fencepost beyond him. The Persian had vanished when he looked up again.

Rajiv sighed, got up and dusted off his jeans. Tonight was obviously a bust. He wasn’t going to have any experimental subjects to call in on his cell, not from this borough anyway; the most gullible and vulnerable pets must have been hunted out here already.

Turning, Rajiv spotted a gray, foreign-looking vehicle moving out of a cross-street into the alley. He froze for a second, then relaxed. City people usually ignored each other, and if someone actually inquired what he was doing, he could say quite truthfully he was on his way home. If they asked about his overtures to the cat, he could say he was trying to make friends, which was even true.

Rajiv shrugged and turned to go.

It was three or four blocks later, standing at a darkening bus stop, that Rajiv saw the unfamiliar vehicle's outline again. For a second he wondered if a plainclothes outfit was tailing him; then he shrugged it off.

When he saw the same gray vehicle a third time, after getting off his bus, Rajiv was certain.

Without a change in step or a turn of his head, Rajiv marched past his street and back to the nearest commercial zone. It had more than a mini-mall and convenience stores; it actually had a supermarket, bookstore, cafés and a single-feature movie house, somehow surviving in a suburban neighbourhood, and therefore this was a high-traffic area. Rajiv walked into a café as if it were his original destination. He spent a half-hour there pretending to read his textbooks, then went to the movie house and bought a ticket he couldn't afford. Halfway through the movie he slipped out, intending to zigzag home.

They caught him in the first alley he entered.

Rajiv never knew why he ducked. Something spanged off the bricks above him, and fragments stung his neck. He sped behind a dumpster and tried to spot the shooter. No movement; no sound.

He counted to fifteen, then tried to dash for the man-high recycling bins. V-W-W-I-I-P – no luck.

Rajiv thought fast, harder than he had ever done. Then he called "I'm coming out! I surrender!" and inched up slowly, putting his hands up first. No shots yet ... nothing yet ...

V-W-W-I-I-P – and he was crouched behind the dumpster again. He didn't even remember getting there.

"Stop that!" he yelled. "I'm unarmed!"

"Sure you're unharmed," an accented voice called, "if we got you, you couldn't talk!"

"I'm NOT ARMED, I said! Who are you assholes, anyway, and why are you shooting at me?!"

"Never you mind, just come out of hiding!" a harder voice commanded.

Dark as it was, Rajiv thought he could spot the shooter now, on a fire escape ... and then he spotted two more man-high figures, one standing in shadows at each end of the alley.

So this was it. Rajiv felt more pissed off than anything, because this end was *pointless*. That faintly surprised him.

He stood up and stepped out, not bothering to raise his arms until the nearest figure stepped up to pat him down. Rajiv saw a husky figure dressed in drab black clothes, wearing black gloves and a balaclava; his partners looked just the same. The big man pulled out Rajiv's wallet, pulled his knapsack off his shoulder, then stepped back to examine the contents with a penlight. The shooter approached. Rajiv didn't recognize the weapon, any more than he had recognized the make of vehicle.

"*Tempus fugit*, guys," the remaining team member called.

"Yeah, yeah ... it's him ... funny! Don't see the notes for his paper here." The penlight turned and glared in Rajiv's face. "What are you studying?" the hard-voiced man demanded.

What was he *studying*? Rajiv knew this kind of heat couldn't be motivated by his catnapping; so what *did* ...? "Uh ... sociology, mainly, since I quit Fine Arts. Some make-up courses in hard sciences ..."

"Found'em," the hard-voiced man said. "Applied logic, and a psychology elective. But none of his theory yet; we're just in time."

"In time for *what*?" Rajiv was bewildered. He was almost ready to be killed, but not ready for this craziness.

The hard-voiced man silently produced a plastic bag containing a switchblade. As he opened it, the shooter said conversationally, "To stop you from inventing –" and the third man growled, "Shut up!"

Rajiv felt flooded with relief. He said, "Oh, you mean that crank theory about sociology? I burned the manuscript."

There was silence for a time in the alley.

The hard-voiced man said furiously, "Jesus, I *told* you to transpose us –" and the third said "Shh!"

"It doesn't matter," Rajiv said. Ridiculous as the situation was, he knew where he stood. "You thought I was going to originate the first rigorous theory of human behaviour, did you? You thought it would explain, and predict, and even allow control of behaviour, from mass actions right down to individuals, at least within limits of probability? Hell, lots of people have had the idea, but almost everybody discounts it ... and I sure as hell can't get it together."

The hard-voiced man said, "Oh yeah? Then what about your courses?"

"That was my brother Ari's idea," said Rajiv. "I had to make up my GPA deficiency somehow."

The shooter had lowered his weapon at this point. He said doubtfully, "Hang on. You said *lots* of people had this idea ...?"

"Sure," said Rajiv. "Look it up in any science fiction section."

There was a somewhat longer pause.

"'Science fiction section'," the hard-voiced man growled. He cradled his face in one hand. "I wondered if we were at the wrong address."

"*Time*, guys!" the third man said insistently.

"Are you worried about the cops?" Rajiv said brightly. "I think you've got a good half-hour's wait. We haven't made much disturbance, and even if anyone *has* noticed us, this is a quiet, relatively upscale neighbourhood. The cops in this city take a while to believe that shootings or knifings happen here."

The third balaclava-face asked, "And you know this because ...?"

"I've been working with the police for a year now," Rajiv said simply. "I'm infiltrating a catnapping and dognapping ring, posing as a dirt-poor student trying to work his way through college. I joined the force just to work as a clerk-typist, but because I *am* a dirt-poor student working his way through college, I got reassigned. While I was still at the precinct, though, I overheard a lot from their dispatch centre."

The three men groaned with disgust and turned to their vehicle. The one with the weapon and the one with the switchblade practically threw them into the back. The third man silently handed back Rajiv's possessions.

The third member of the team entered first, and put his head out again to announce, "Yeah, we're off our coordinates. We're at –" and the hard-voiced man said "Shh!"

The man who had been designated shooter paused, and turned to Rajiv. “We can leave you alone,” he said, “partly because you burned your manuscript, and partly because you report that your theory is a science-fiction idea here ... but mostly, because you’re working with the police.”

“My cognates don’t do that, eh?” Rajiv said interestedly.

The shooter froze.

“You found the name you expected on my ID,” Rajiv said. “and outside of the arts community, who’s going to have a name like mine? You found the course materials you expected in my pack. You were assigned to eliminate a threat, though I hadn’t done anything threatening ... *yet*. So I have to think, ‘time travel’. And *still*, I wasn’t the Rajiv you were sent for. So I have to conclude there is more than one timeline, and you aren’t in quite the right one.”

A police siren began to emerge from the urban background noise.

“All right. I shouldn’t pursue my crank theory again. You know where to find me anyway,” Rajiv added. “And I can’t say anything about time travel either, for the same reason. Is there anything you *would* prefer that I do?”

The man in front of him relaxed, and punched him lightly on the shoulder. “You could have helped to create a slave society, and destroyed all the chances and choices people could have. Or ... you could open up choices and opportunities.” He nipped into the vehicle and closed the door before Rajiv could respond.

Both the vehicle and Rajiv were gone when the squad car arrived.

(published in *BCSFazine*, December 2004)



Transaction Declined (Sherman Ochs)

Hrothgar Weems normally worked days, but the temp. agency had given him an emergency evening assignment at a time when he really couldn’t pass it up. After a grueling six hours of transcription and word-processing corrections, and struggling with the client’s unique brand of English, Hrothgar was exhausted and low-spirited; wending his way home at nearly midnight did not lighten his mood, and he was brooding about the debts he still couldn’t cover, as he stepped out of the rapid transit terminal.

When a municipal clock struck the hour, a tall, dark figure stepped into his path. Hrothgar trucked over to one side, mumbling “Scuse me”.

The dark figure moved with him, and stepped into his space.

“Hey!”

Two hands clapped onto Hrothgar’s shoulders, and pulled him forward. Hrothgar, startled, raised his forearms and pushed off the hands, with difficulty.

“Hey, back off! I don’t want –“

One hand shot out, clasped itself around Hrothgar’s throat, and pulled him off his feet. The fanged mouth approached.

“Oh, what the hell,” Hrothgar thought, so he went limp.

The dark figure paused, and in the faint street light he saw a frown on the distorted face. “What the hell is *wrong* with you?” the stranger asked.

Hrothgar found he was standing on his own again, and his throat was free. He scratched it. “You’re a vampire, aren’t you?” he said thinly. “Or are you just one of these Goth wannabes?”

The dark eyes widened as the faced frowned more deeply. “Goth boys?”

Hrothgar sighed. “Guess you’re the real deal. Uh, some people actually *want* to be vampires. Not my party, but not many things are.” He straightened up and lifted his chin. “So, do you just need a blood donation, or do you have to take my life, when you feed?”

The vampire moved away a little, looking slightly repulsed. “Whatever is the *matter* with you?” he asked. “This is the third time this year my prey hasn’t run, or screamed, hasn’t even *resisted* the bloodletting!”

Hrothgar took a long look at the taller man. “Oh, I see,” he said. “You want an answer before you give me one. Good enough. My deal is, I’m just fed up. I don’t get a lot out of life, I’ve given up expecting more out of life. If I live, if I die, it’s all the same to me, right now. Maybe you’re just now meeting other people who feel the same way. What do you think?”

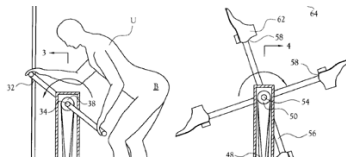
“But *why*?” the vampire burst out. “How can you live, and draw breath, and ... and ...” Just at the moment, he looked a lot like Hrothgar’s maternal uncle, when he was also baffled and offended. Also by something Hrothgar said, now that he thought about it.

Hrothgar shrugged wearily. “I dunno. Maybe I’m in the wrong line of work, or I can’t find the right girl. Maybe there’s just too much plastic in my diet. Maybe I’m not making the right effort, to get some satisfaction.” He looked squarely at the dark, taller man.

The vampire looked squarely at Hrothgar.

After a moment the taller man stepped back. And again. Turning, he started running.

Hrothgar watched the figure retreat, realizing that he had freaked out a blood-sucking monster. Then he went to see if he could catch the last bus home.



Candour (Hrothgar Weems)

The Anarcho-Surrealist campaign headquarters resembled a political campaign office less than it looked like a primary school arts and crafts studio. There were desks and phones and heaps of paper everywhere, as expected, and in every level of disorganization; the spy also saw brightly-coloured posters, message pads, planning calendars, and a large banner reading LIE DOWN ON THE FLOOR AND KEEP CALM.

“Where do I sign up to volunteer?” Bedard asked. There was a comfortable-looking matron with bright pink hair at the reception desk. Behind her, a poster displayed a photograph of a toothy twit in a dated suit, holding a sign saying THE STAR OF OUR SHOW – HARRY WARD-WAKE.

“This is the place,” she said. “Or as Harry puts it, ‘There is no place quite like this place, anywhere near this place, so this has to be the place!’” She dragged an enormous leather-bound volume across the table, prominently titled THE ARTICLES. “Just sign The Articles, but

be sure to read them first.” There seemed to be a suppressed smile on her face. She added, “It helps if you add your email or your phone number, so we can contact you.”

Bedard opened the volume and searched at the beginning for The Articles. They read in part:

- We all live in anarchy, and always have done. Look at how much gets done by individual initiative, instead of by authorization or license or permission; or how much law recognizes established possession and occupation, or “easements” in land.
- Government is a security blanket, like monarchy or social services or guns. Their main function is to make us feel more secure. Whether they actually make us more secure is a matter for argument. The arguments never end.
- Anarchism as a social system has never been tried, whatever you may have heard. Maybe it's worth a shot?
- Surrealism is an artistic sensibility, and a way of seeing things with common-sense assumptions set aside.
- Anarcho-Surrealism means applying the surrealist sensibility to social systems.
- There is NO POINT SIX.
- No anarchists were harmed in the making of this manifesto.

Suppressing an eye-roll, Bedard flipped to the last page with writing, signing his cover name and contact information with careful legibility. His photographic memory picked up other signatures, some of them legible and some not.

“What needs doing the most?” Bedard asked. “Most of my skills are clerical ...”

“Oh, that would help a lot,” Pink Lady said. “We also need a good deal of help with posterage and canvassing and distributing leaflets, but just maintaining records is starting to become a challenge ...”

“Digital or hardcopy files?”

“Both!”

##

“We have a delicate situation to defuse,” the Chief had said a couple of weeks earlier. Bedard had noticed the Chief started alliterating when he was stressed, and he did it quite unconsciously. Bedard stood at ease before the desk and listened. The source of stress would reveal itself, or not.

The Chief offered some statistical documents. “You may have heard of a new fringe party campaigning on the West Coast, now that B.C. is preparing for another election,” he continued. “The Anarcho-Surrealists seem to be a sophomoric joke, like the Parti Rhinoceros before them, and like the Rhinos we expected them to die eventually of attrition. But right now, the anarchists are getting remarkable support, and it's increasing rapidly.”

Bedard looked at the graphs and his mouth opened. Normally B.C. voters were split between right- and left-wing parties – those who still voted – but the ASP had apparently captured a *third* of the voters within a few months of their appearance ... or they had actually motivated thousands of apathetic residents, who hadn't registered to vote in years.

“Unprecedented”, Bedard ventured to say.

“Well, not entirely,” the Chief said. He frowned; it whitened the scars on his face. Bedard guessed they dated back to Iraq, or Afghanistan, or some other peacekeeping action. “There are parallels in the rise of the Social Credit Party and the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, in the 1930s. ... “

(to be continued)

The Justice League of Samsara (Hrothgar Weems)

“The first item on the agenda is the current state of drug trafficking in the Lower Mainland,” the portly cowed figure at the head of the table said. He flapped the paper-clipped agenda forward a page, losing the paper clip in the process and gripping the papers tighter. “Horus, your report?”

A skinny pale figure in a linen kilt and enormous animal mask rose. “My report this month can be summarized as an extension of last month's, or indeed last year's report,” he said tonelessly. “The traffic in illegal drugs through the Port of Samsara is enormous, as great as through Seattle or Portland, and cannot be extricated from criminal gang activity, illegal arms trade, or human trafficking. Oh, the numbers change, the players change, their funding to corrupt police personnel and political fronts changes, but the profile remains the same.” He held up a thumb drive. “As usual I have securely uploaded my research database to all your anonymous accounts, with updates.” He sat down without adding that he expected, as usual, the members of the meeting to defer action until they had the means to crack down on the gangs and the corrupt officials. They never had.

The action recommendation was raised, and was deferred as expected.

“The next item is ...” the chairman peered at the paper in front of him. “Biltis, is this right? Are people actually proposing to legalize prostitution?”

“Or sex workers, or sex therapists,” she replied. “Yes.” The short-spoken woman was unremarkable in being slim and shapely and wearing a business suit, apart from her gloves and domino mask.

“What,” the portly man chuckled, “are they going to legalize grass next?”

“That has already happened,” Biltis pointed out gently.

The chairman stared at them silently for a minute, tapping on the table. Others at the table stared back stonily.

“The chair is correct to point out the parallel between these movements,” said a bodybuilder at the foot of the table. His costume was all-black, but could have passed for a business suit, if not for the bondage mask he wore. “The honourable members are also correct to report these movements on their merits: decriminalization, or full legalization, would remove two major sources of revenue from criminal hands. Which is why criminal organizations are supporting political fronts that oppose decriminalization. We may let matters follow their course, or provide discreet security and promotion to the aforesaid movements.” Discussion followed, predictably resolving to gather information and provide it anonymously as the movements needed it.

“Our next item,” the chair carried on, “has been deferred entirely too long. How many occurrences of police misconduct, municipal and federal, have we witnessed in the last quarter, or in the last year? Has there been an increase or decrease? Is action required, and what kind? Odin?”

The black-clad figure arose. “A thorough examination of the record of the police department is ongoing, as always,” he said, “but we have the general profile of the department already. As expected, a majority of officers are honest, competent, and doing essential work for their community; a minority, under 12 percent, are identified as committing rapes, taking bribes, shaking down pushers and streetwalkers, abusing street people, or committing more petty crimes while in uniform.

“Until recent years, as probative evidence is discovered we supply it to the internal affairs department. As we also expected, a minority of internal affairs charges are laid; if they are not prosecuted to the full extent of the law, we feed information anonymously to newspapers and

broadcast media. Which actually *spiked* a good many news stories, and we were lucky to save them before they were trashed or erased. But in the last two years a flood of amateur video recordings of police brutality have appeared on social media, provoking a public outcry.

“In addition, a thorough examination of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is ongoing. At our last two meetings I reported this is really *ultra vires* and should be handled by the Justice League of Canada; but our attempts to contact them have met with no response for three months. This week, one of my contacts at the Ottawa *Citizen* finally discovered that the chapter was in bankruptcy, and that allowed CSIS to locate and arrest the active members.”

The flat statement raised an outcry at the meeting. “Why haven't you reported this before?!” the chair sputtered.

“I am reporting it, as soon as possible,” Odin stated flatly. “I just found out *five minutes* before this meeting. All possible measures for this chapter's security have been taken. Before we tyled the meeting, email addresses, passwords and aliases were changed; any information leading to this address or our identities has been modified, and tailored virus programs are erasing any resulting discrepancies in public records.

“May I return to my report?” he asked. “There are even more urgent matters requiring our attention, arising out of the RCMP investigation.”

“*More urgent?!*”

“Yes. It begins to appear that there has been a concerted effort to undermine the effectiveness and integrity of the RCMP,” Odin went on evenly, “continuing over several decades and administrations.”

The chair took a long, calming breath and gestured for Odin to continue.

Odin rose and activated a large wall display screen. “The record of police brutality and malfeasance attributed to the RCMP shows some odd, consistent features, indicating hacking from overseas servers ...”

(to be continued)



Serialized Novella

The Jade Ring (Jaroslav Schweik)

Once upon a time, in the sleepy seaside town of Spuzzum, by the great, green, greasy Fraser River, all hung about with cedar trees, there was a happy little science fiction club with happy little fans. And they held meetings, and parties, and put out a little publication, and traded for other people's fanzines, and went to movies and talked about SF, and were as happy as you can be when you and your friends are struggling students in the middle of a recession.

One day Hrothgar Weems was ignoring the meeting proceedings and reading some of the fanzines received by his club, when he realized his friend Bernie was talking to him.

"... big fish in a little pond again," Bernie was saying. His full name was Ernest Bernhard Wolfgang Friedrich Siegfried Gunther Klaus Inger Stroheim Ruprecht Hentzau Schleswig Holstein Trish-trash-am-Wiesen von Ulm, which was why everyone called him Bernie. "Not as if he has much else to offer, of course."

"Eh?" said Hrothgar. "Who?"

"Paul," Bernie said patiently. He meant the club president.

"Oh," said Hrothgar. He was club librarian, and had to fight with Paul, who collected the club's mail, to get the recent trade zines out of his apartment, available to members, and into the library. "Any idea what to do about him? Who else can stand for election?"

"Well, like Polly was saying last Saturday, everyone else has a job, or full-time classes, or both," Bernie said glumly. He had a squarish face and collar-length dark hair. Hrothgar thought he was suited to looking glum.

"Could be worse, I suppose," Hrothgar said reflectively. The club was meeting in an upstairs room in the Mairzie Doaks Bay Recreation Centre; looking around the room, Hrothgar saw about a dozen students, none wearing the height of fashion. Three were listening to Paul talk at the front of the room; the others were reading or talking among themselves. "At least Paul stood for election, and he gets some things done." I could name a lot of people here who won't do either, he thought to himself.

Bernie snorted. "Yeah, we could have Torri Bupkis running for president."

"Who?" Hrothgar blinked. Blinking was his most noticeable expression, given his strong glasses. He had fair, nondescript features and nondescript clothes.

"Torri Bupkis. Oh, you don't know Nat Kinder? A gamer we met at the University; Torri is his sister," Bernie said. "Doesn't know much about *any* SF besides Star Wars, doesn't really know *anything* about fandom beyond the Official Star Wars Fan Club. She keeps talking about the novel she's submitting to publishers, and the costuming she did at Worldcon, and the fanzine she's going to do." Bernie grinned, looking over at Paul. "Only thing she actually produced was her hall costume, and that was kind of lame. I've seen pictures ... Yeah, I think we're better off with Paul."

Hrothgar was beginning to feel as if he were cramped in an airless closet half his height. "Can we talk about science fiction or something?" he asked.

#

The most fun Hrothgar had, with his science fiction friends, was outside of meetings at the Hungry Logger. A half-dozen or so people gathered there, outside of scheduled meetings and events, and talked about anything at all; and Hrothgar usually found these amorphous gabfests more imaginative and interesting than anything anyone planned.

"You wanna know *my* problem with the *Star Wars* series?" Lester said, immediately popping a handful of French fries into his mouth. Hrothgar thought Lester was the boniest 19-year-old he had ever seen, except for the child of a vegetarian professor at his college. "It's the logical inconsistencies. Feudal titles and high-tech swords just aren't on, not in a high-energy, interstellar, distance-weapon civilization."

"But it works *beautifully* on a, like, spiritual level," Zoe protested. "The characters and relationships are absolutely mythic ..."

"And absolutely copied from *The Magnificent Seven*," Mick interrupted, "which ripped it off from *Seven Samurai*."

Hrothgar's eyebrows rose. "I didn't know ..."

"Just thought it was the neatest thing since sliced bread, did you?" Bernie said wryly. Bernie had spoken like this two or three times at the meeting, the way Hrothgar didn't quite know what Bernie was getting at.

"No, actually I thought it was ... well ... hokey."

Zoe looked at Hrothgar as if he were something a cat had dragged in, and turned to talk to Mick. Bernie overregistered surprise. "What?! Someone *doesn't* think *Star Wars* is the neatest thing since sliced bread?! Sacrilege! Heresy!! Mind what you say in public, Hrothgar, the peasants might burn you at the stake."

Lester cackled. Hrothgar blinked at Bernie. "What are you on?" he said after a pause. Mick laughed. Hrothgar felt adrift.

"No, we're not laughing at you," Bernie said eventually, "I just have this reaction to this here *Star Wars* cult that seems to be forming."

"Eh?" said Hrothgar.

"You mean Torri, don't you?" said Mick. "Hey, man, you don't really have to put down people for liking *Star Wars*."

"Like, okay. But idolize? Last three times she promised special events, I thought it meant a science lecture or at least a *Buckaroo Banzai* viewing; she meant playing her bootleg *Star Wars* videotapes."

"Which we never got to," Lester said slowly, contemplatively. He munched his organic beefalo burger slowly and swallowed.

Feeling the conversation had stalled, Hrothgar started thumbing through his handouts. "I'm not sure I can make this out," he said tentatively. "Bernie, what does this say?"

Bernie broke off what he was saying to Mick about the *auteur* theory and leaned over. "Just what it seems to say," he said, surprised. "'Norwescon '79 in Seattle.' Ever been to Norwescon?"

"What's a Norwescon?"

Stanley looked blankly at him, then at everyone else. "Haven't you guys explained anything yet?" he asked. "Hrothgar, that's a science fiction convention. It's one of the biggest in the Northwest."

"Convention?" Hrothgar muttered.

"Read: orgy," Mick said, and laughed.

"Keep in mind," Bernie told him once, "these are *not* 'conventions' as mortals know conventions. When fans say 'convention', they don't mean what hotel sales staff or Shriners are talking about."

##

"So what do they mean?" Hrothgar asked, taking another cookie. He was visiting Bernie and his girlfriend Polly at their apartment, not long after they moved in together.

Bernie looked at Polly. Hrothgar looked at Polly.

"I went to a local convention, just over in Samsara," she said in a storytelling voice. "First off, I didn't have to register as a delegate or anything, just as an individual. I could have registered at the door, for that matter, but I saved money by registering in advance, for the writers' workshop. For another thing, it was basically a weekend event – started Friday afternoon or so, went on through Sunday. There were panels during the day, and that part was like a conference. There were also rooms set aside for an artshow, and a dealers' room ..."

"Dealers?" Hrothgar asked, raising his eyebrows. He was taking lessons in sardonic from Bernie.

Polly put her tongue out at him. "No, silly. Booksellers. Costume makers. People who sell *Star Trek* earrings or calendars – things like that. Do you know there are *companies* turning out tapes of filksongs?"

"I heard of filksongs in the clubzine ..." Hrothgar said uncertainly.

"Well, now it's a business," Polly went on, "creating original SF- or fantasy-inspired music, and not just parodies of sea chanties and 'Waltzing Mathilda'. There were a couple of film show rooms, too, and a hospitality suite – just a place to sit down and chat. My point is, the whole thing felt more like a carnival midway than a writers' conference, and at night people were holding all these parties in their rooms ..."

"Remember Toilet Bowl Night, in the dorms, after the Spuzzum Otters beat the Samsara Steelheads?" Bernie said, looking up at the ceiling and grinning wistfully. Polly smirked and swatted him lightly on the arm. Hrothgar shuddered; the student paper had assigned him to cover the college hockey team's victory celebrations, and some of the ensuing litigation. Campus services were still repairing the damages in the dormitories.

"Now, Bernie, it wasn't like that; nobody got violent, or even threatening. More like a big Christmas family dinner, a frat party, a tribal gathering and an indoor county fair. Well, a couple of people were playing Logan's Run upstairs ..."

"Oh, yeah, and weren't you telling me Mick had to pull three guys off you in the elevator when you wore —?"

"*What?*" Hrothgar protested. Bernie guffawed. Polly threw a pillow at him.

"Bernie, stop pulling his leg! Hrothgar, it was fun. The point of the parties was, there were people up from Seattle and Portland, promoting their cons, and there were some visitors from Alberta."

"Now wait a minute," Hrothgar said. "I thought I read about promotional parties in the clubzine. How come I didn't see any written background about all this?"

"Because all these convention features are taken for granted," Bernie said, smiling. "And the average congoer never thinks to explain anything, until they have something to bitch about. Which, I sometimes think, is half the point of the game."

Hrothgar still felt he was missing something here.

##

The oddest things can be fun, if people do them together. Because British Columbia had at least its share of jadeite or nephrite, one of the standard features of tacky tourist shops in Spuzzum was a display of green "BC jade" rings and trinkets. Because the Spuzzum SF Society was looking for a trademark, they found themselves adopting jade rings. Soon everyone was wearing them and complaining how easily they got cracked and damaged.

##

"Hey, did you see this?" Paul was peering at one of the club's fanzines. "Says here that Seattle is bidding for Westercon again."

"What's Westercon?" Hrothgar wondered.

Deborah McGarvey looked up from her chocolate sundae. Hrothgar admired her heart-shaped face, framed by wavy red hair. "Westercon? That's a big travelling convention," she said. "Travels up and down the coast, I hear. Lots of authors attend." She pushed her rimless glasses up her nose with a burgundy-lacquered nail. People started burbling about Westercon:

"Hope they do better than last time ..."

"That wasn't their fault! ..."

"Owe it to us to know the hotel better ..."

Hrothgar was adrift again. Later, reading the pile of fanzines he was reviewing, Hrothgar learned there were competing Washington-state convention committees, with members on past Westercon committees. It began to seem as if the Westercon bid had been preceded by a tide of rumours – regardless, it seemed, of the bid committee's real strengths or weaknesses.

It also seemed that different fan-run conventions had different interests, slightly tangential to science fiction; and they did not always share or support each other's interests. A year and a half after joining the Spuzzum group, Hrothgar understood this was part of the deal. There was also a Star Trek group in town, and a campus SF club, and while they teamed up to hold mall displays and charity events, they were not on the same wavelength. Their interests did not really mesh.

##

Polly Johnson later thought that the trump of doom can be the sound of a phone call. One March she dried her hands hurriedly on the dish towel and picked up the receiver. "Hello?"

"Hi Polly this is Torri I've made contracts with two hotels and talked to some pros and it looks like I've set up the con for next year could you sort of talk to the clubs for me?"

Polly had to pause for a minute to replay Torri at half speed. "Did I hear you say that *you* were setting up next year's convention?"

"Yeah my gang have some ideas we'd like to try and it's time for a real convention so would the clubs like to work on this with us?"

Polly thought about the two one-day conventions she and her friends had held, and the plans they were already making for next year. She also thought about Torri Bupkis. A nasty creepy feeling was beginning to come over her. What kind of plans was Torri making, anyway? Did she have *any* capital, any resources at all? When were they planning to hold this con? She tried to ask, but the rest of the conversation always remained a blur in her mind.

Presently Polly found herself staring at the spice rack and biting split ends off her long black hair. —I have *got* to stop doing this, she thought disgustedly. A worry line marked her pale oval face. —How the hell are the clubs going to take this?

*

"When I moved out here from Saskatchewan," Polly told Hrothgar later, "I found myself joining the Canadian Trek Federation. I didn't realize at first their entire membership was here in Spuzzum. I was going to all the club meetings and attending out-of-town conventions for a year and a half before I ever heard of the other clubs in town."

Hrothgar raised his eyebrows. "Your take is so different from mine," he said. "Me, I thought the clubs were doing just about everything together – movie nights, mall displays, you name it." He huddled into his parka; they were heading to a meeting on campus at the SUB, and a freezing cold front had just moved in. "I only saw the second one-day con," he said. "Tell me about the first one."

Polly shrugged. "We had a little programming, a dealers' room, a fanzine table. Paul wanted to set up a film room but he didn't get it together in time. I think the advertising was inadequate, but we still got over 350 people. Why?"

Hrothgar exhaled heavily. "I just did some volunteering at the second one. I remember being surprised how many people heard of the con; I heard we drew over 450 people, but it didn't look like half that many ... there was some problem later I heard about, something about trying to account for all the expenses and revenue. They made some money, and people had a lot of fun, but it was a lot of trouble to finish the financial statement."

"The time of year didn't help," Polly pointed out. "Midterm break may be our only time window, but it practically guarantees we'll lose track of details right after the con."

"What about a summer convention?"

"Students go work in summer, remember?" They came to the SUB and Hrothgar opened the door for Polly. "Thank you."

Polly introduced Hrothgar to Rudi Sterner, a short albino with coke-bottle glasses who represented the gaming club on campus. Polly represented the Trekkers and Hrothgar the Spuzzum SF Society. After they got some fries and coffee and found a table, Hrothgar asked, "Who is this Torri person, anyway?"

"We know her through her brother Nat," Rudi said. "He's one of our active members." Rudi chuckled. "He brought her up here on a game night and she started jabbering about *Battlestar Galactica* and her fan club; we couldn't get started until she took a hike. That's all I know about her."

Hrothgar looked at Polly. She remembered Ernie meeting Torri at Hallowe'en and using the word "ditz" within fifteen minutes. Hrothgar said, "Why does this woman even *think* she's setting up a convention? Why didn't she contact the clubs first, and *ask* if they were planning anything?"

"I have an idea," Polly said carefully. "Last Hallowe'en she and Nat showed up at the party at my parents' place. Rudi, do you remember what she was saying to Nat?"

"I think they had just gone to the Worldcon in Chicago", he said. "I seem to remember her saying 'Gee that was just great we oughta hold something just like that here!'"

"A *Worldcon*?" "In *Spuzzum*?" "Get real!" they said variously, and all at once.

*

"FiesCon '83" was advertised in 1982 as a media-oriented SF convention to be held in Spuzzum, B.C., in February 1983, in two hotels — the Empire and the Bay Tower — drawing at least 1500 people. Memberships were sold at \$25 a head. As early as June 1982, many members of the Spuzzum clubs thought that the FiesCon plans were grandiose and unworkable.

Hrothgar seemed to remember someone — maybe it was Bernie's voice he remembered — saying something about "hotel sales staff", and Shriners. Now, it meant something; it meant that Torri Bupkis's daydreams were going to clash with the mundane demands of a professional business, and Torri refused to hear a warning in her interest.

"It's like they keep going home to an alternate reality, where talking fast and wishing really hard can make anything so", Hrothgar found himself saying. "I can almost feel reality coming unglued."

#

One fine day Hrothgar walked out of the Unemployment Centre into the transporter chamber of the *Enterprise*.

A pause ensued while he and the duty officer gaped at each other.

The duty officer recovered first. "Step off the transporter platform, please", he asked politely. When in doubt, go by the book.

Hrothgar dithered off the platform, swinging off his knapsack on the way. --Okay, I'm hallucinating, he told himself. --I wonder if UI covers psychological counselling? First thing I'll do is stop watching TV ...

The doors dilated and a couple of husky Security officers stepped in. Hrothgar recognized the sound of the door as he turned; the colour of the Security tunics; the shape of the phasers pointed at him as the officers assumed identical Weaver stances. --Oh, I guess I'm in this hallucination for a while, he thought glumly.

When Security dumped him in a holding cell, *sans* knapsack, parka and his outer clothing, Hrothgar had revised his assumptions about Federation procedure. Shakily he pulled up his Stanfields and started to examine his cell.

A change in the hum of the security entrance distracted him. Three executive officers stood outside, each covered by another Security linebacker. Evidently the prisoner was at home to visitors ... but why did he rate Captain Kirk, Commander Spock and Lieutenant Saavik?

"Mr. ... Weems, is it?" Kirk said as Spock and Saavik entered. "We have to ask a series of questions to confirm your identity, and the reason you boarded the *Enterprise* unannounced."

Hrothgar spread his hands as Saavik approached. "Look, I don't know what I'm doing here," he began. "In fact I think this is all an hallucination."

Kirk did an impression of Spock saying "Fascinating". Spock and Saavik looked at each other. Spock nodded and Saavik approached Hrothgar. Hrothgar wished he had showered since that morning.

"Lt. Saavik will examine your mind to corroborate your questioning," Spock said. "You should understand that, having boarded a Starfleet vessel on assignment without announcement or permission, you are considered potentially hostile under Regulation--" he recited a string of numerals Hrothgar immediately forgot. "Your permission and consent are thus not required for a mind probe." Spock paused. "Unofficially, I will tell you that a mind probe is the quickest and most effective way to establish your *bona fides*. It is also far easier, and sooner finished, if you open your mind voluntarily. Logically, it is entirely in your interest to cooperate."

Outwardly, Hrothgar shrugged and said, "Very well, let's do it." Inwardly he thought, oh great, no privacy left. He was glumly philosophical about it.

The mind probe was a basic new experience, like the rectal examination. On the one hand, Hrothgar felt Saavik's cool, strong fingers probing his head for nerve clusters; on the other hand, he saw a myopic adolescent Terran face. On the one hand Saavik perceived a basically insecure ego trying over and over again to assert its boundaries, while on the other he saw Saavik's face turn red, and then white.

Saavik jerked her hands back.

Spock said in Vulcan, "You have to overcome resistance. It can be instinctual."

"There was no resistance", Saavik said slowly, then repeated herself for the Captain's benefit. "He knows far too much about the *Enterprise* and the Federation, about each of us, but ... he is not hostile." She looked at Spock and Kirk, and Spock thought her shockingly emotional. "He truly does know us as ... fictional characters."

The guest suite Hrothgar was next escorted to was bigger and much better furnished than the cell, and he was fully clothed again, but it was still a holding cell. Hrothgar could tell because two more Security defensemen were posted outside, and he couldn't get out once he got in.

--This hallucination is getting really old, he thought.

Wandering around the suite, Hrothgar found a) a 23rd-century toilet, which he promptly used, b) a food replicator, c) a computer terminal. He succeeded in dialing himself a coffee and a Danish (the replicator had no data on Nanaimo bars) and seated himself at the terminal.

"Computer?" he said experimentally.

The terminal beeped but said nothing. The screen was blank.

"Computer, are you voice- or keyboard-operated?"

[This terminal is a stand-alone unit], said the screen. *[Only e-mail communications are operative with other terminals on the Enterprise. Any attempt to operate programs at a distance will be immediately reported.]*

"That's cool ... Look, computer, could I place a request with Security?"

[Working] the computer screen printed, ambiguously.

"Well, I just wanted to know when I could have my backpack back. Just an inquiry, you know, and at their convenience, that sort of thing."

[Verbatim request transmitted], the screen informed him.

"Oh sh-- ... Well, all right.

"Um, do you offer any entertainment? Library research functions? For God's sake, do you have any music?!"

[Entertainment: off-duty personnel and ship's guests may open channels #3 - #290; directory of current broadcasts scrolling on channel #2. Library: this terminal limited to truncated Encyclopedia Galactica in local memory. Music: this terminal's music library includes Federation Anthology of Classics, complete as of last ship's docking and refitting. Theological reference does not compute, presumed phatic.]

Hrothgar stared at the screen.

"Um ... would you have any Rolling Stones?"

The computer began playing "You Can't Always Get What You Want."

Hrothgar drifted off to sleep on the bed. When he awoke, he was in bed at home – fully dressed, on top of the covers, but at home. His backpack and other belongings were also in his room.

Alarums and Excursions

As the year drew to an end in sleepy seaside Spuzzum College (by the great greasy-green banks of the Fraser River, all hung about with cedar trees), Hrothgar and Dafydd Moncrieff sat in the Student Union cafeteria, talking about mutual acquaintances. Hrothgar was saying, "I wish I understood what was going on in their heads. I wish we could get through to them. Seems like they live in their own fantasy world ..." Visions of his close encounter with Saavik on the *Enterprise* rolled through his head. "... and not only can we *not* get through, but they have to twist everything we say into some plot against them."

"Yeah, well, I think the worst part of the affair is the effect on the clubs," Dafydd said.

"How's that?"

"Well ..." Dafydd said glumly, "I get the feeling that the ST club won't trust me anymore." This surprised Hrothgar; Dafydd was editor of the Trekkers' clubzine and their *de facto* information officer. "I know why," Dafydd continued, "it's because Sean used to be my neighbour. Now that he's gone over to the Fiescon committee, the president suspects me of being a fellow traveler. And Sean and the Fiescon gang keep bugging me for copies of the club minutes. They don't realize, even *I* don't get them now. And then there's the effect on our Contraception committee ..."

At that moment a gangly apparition came in, and walked over. "Have you bought your Fiescon memberships yet?" Nat Kinder asked brightly.

Hrothgar looked at Nat silently for a moment.

"Me?" he asked. "You're asking me? For money??" He was getting progressively louder. "You don't ask me for money!! Not me, not now!!!"

##

Ernest Wolfgang Friedrich Siegfried Gunther Klaus Inger Stroheim Hentzau Schleswig-Holstein Trishtrash-am-Wiesen von Ulm dreamed (unless his chilly feet warned him otherwise) that he stood in a vast marble hallway. His jade ring winked conspicuously on his hand in the dim light. Antediluvian sculptures (how did I know *that* word? He wondered) leered at him ominously. He never knew sculptures could do that.

Suddenly rough hands grabbed him and drew into a side passage. "They have eyes, they do," a voice hissed in his ear, just loud enough not to carry. "They see without being there, they hear you a mile off; you have to hide like me!"

Ernie looked blearily at a man wearing ... an iron helmet? "Who are you?" he asked. "Oh, I know, you're the Man in the Iron Mask."

"*Non*," the muffled voice replied, "he was the fugitive here before me; he left last month. I am the Phantom of the Opera, *moi*; I wear his mask because everything that obscures me seems to help."

Ernie suppressed an impulse to ask the Phantom why he hung around, then. "I've pulled a Hrothgar, I think," he muttered to himself. Then he asked, "Tell me, what happened to your predecessor?"

"He escaped to his proper place and time, *alors!*"

"And I've somehow left mine," Ernie muttered. "That's what Hrothgar keeps doing. Cause, or cure? I wonder ..." He stared at his ring.

(to be continued)



Science Fact, or something like it (Rajiv Witherspoon-Li)

Crank theories about the sciences may be an expression of popular ignorance about how science works, or even an indication of common mental problems – or, they might be considered a form of creative art. In the spirit of entertaining ourselves with absurdities, perhaps we could compete to offer crank theories for publication and amusement.

There seem to be established themes in common crank theories, such as:

- Unproven or disproven premises, such as the luminiferous ether, pre-Sumerian technological civilizations, alien ancestors, or the hollow Earth
- Groundless assumptions, such as "Science" being an erroneous belief system rather than a learning system, or "Science" claiming to answer all questions, or "the Establishment" stifling dissent or faith
- Misuse, vagueness or ignorance of terminology
- Introduction of redundant terminology when established terms exist
- Ignorance of established science

- Reinventing the wheel
- Reliance on outdated or disproven theories
- Invalid reasoning, circular arguments and common fallacies
- Special pleading, i.e. appeals to Biblical authority, or other scriptures
- Foregone conclusions, such as an impending apocalypse
- Failures of grammar, or coherence
- Frequent misuse of capitals or special emphases beyond need or reason

The following theory is humbly offered as a trial submission for your entertainment.

##

SOCIOLOGICAL RIGOUR

Garth Spencer

Proposition: social sciences will actually become sciences once they establish a common notational system, as John Dalton established for chemistry, and as Noam Chomsky attempted to do for linguistics.

Argument: one of the first things you notice in academic prose, and on university campuses, is a distinction between “hard” and “soft” sciences. The several branches of physics, astronomy, geology chemistry, and mixed disciplines such as biochemistry are distinguished by precise measurement of specific masses and substances, and reliable calculations of their properties and the processes they go through. Until recent decades, however, fields of research such as the branches of biology and social science did not lend themselves directly to mathematical rigour.

Perhaps a qualitative, rather than quantitative rigour is available for “soft” sciences. This seems arguable on the grounds that

- there have always been individuals with a natural talent for reading other people, either individually or as groups, predicting their probable reactions to events, and even manipulating their behaviour;
- the subjects of social science – populations, or individuals, their environmental conditions, or their behaviours – may be identified and symbolized, like chemical elements, but they do not lend themselves to measurements, like masses or their chemical reactions;
- there are notational conventions in set theory and in formal logic which can be adapted to symbolize social subjects, their properties and the processes they go through;
- there are also notational conventions in probability theory, which might be adapted to quantify the probability of social outcomes from a set of social conditions.

Prior Literature: One of the several things science fiction authors do is to invent future, alternative, even alien societies - either to satirize our own foibles, or to play about with ideas, and explore how a society could be different and still work. This segues very easily into inquiring how some kinds of people could meddle with other people’s affairs, treating their own culture the way mechanics treat cars. How have stories like this worked out?

Some basic assumptions have to be observed here, such as:

1. Human behaviour is different in different places, and at different times, and not obviously rational anywhere; but you can follow how humans behave, if you accept that it is merely patterned, has causes and effects, even without being rational;
2. you can predict, and even influence what people do, if you just observe the relevant factors;
3. we actually pay some people good money to do this to us (politicians, preachers, advertisers, con artists, other people like that).

Disposing of Misconceptions:

Why explain behaviour? Some of us think human behaviour is obvious, makes “common sense” and needs no explanation. But apart from demonstrating no sense of history or travel, this attitude fails to explain why those of us living right here and now do the things we do at Easter and Hallowe'en and Christmas; it fails to explain political ceremonies, or the uniforms businessmen wear, or the dress and customs that have become traditional in modern slums.

Critical Assumptions:

Asimov (1951) assumed, for the Foundation series of novels, that very large populations show predictable, sequential patterns of behaviour, over historical spans of time; and that some millennia in the future, mathematical tools would exist to describe and predict them.

Heinlein (1941) and Anderson () assumed - for their future histories - that the factors in social situations could be analyzed, symbolized, and their consequences or appropriate interventions logically inferred. Anderson was far more specific about sources for key concepts, and for analytical tools.

Kingsbury (1986) assumed the primacy of games theory to model, and intervene in, dysfunctional interactions.

The common picture that these SF authors paint is a picture of a professional, bending over a computer screen, a notebook or some foolscap pages, analyzing compiled sociological data in a form of symbolic logic, or planning a psycho-social "intervention" that way. By now, as much as fifty years since the Asimov and Anderson stories were written, this image seems a bit facile or reductionist. One is tempted to think that these authors, in their period, confused science with engineering and assumed sociology would conform to engineering standards of practice. (Of course it didn't, but the reasons bear articulating.)

Prior Anecdotal Information:

Asimov (1951) was particularly given to documenting his reasoning. In one of his non-fiction essays he described a classic sequence of historical events, duplicated with great fidelity in a) the "Glorious Revolution" in England, b) the French Revolution, and c) the Russian Revolution.

Other historical/sociological patterns are not hard to find. I myself wrote a formula for another, fairly classic sequence of events, almost exactly duplicated through the rise and fall of the Ku Klux Klan, in the U.S.; the rise and fall of the Nazionale Sozialistische Partei Arbeiter, in Germany; and the rise (and long-term survival) of the Afrikaner Broederbond, in South Africa. I could also cite the classic historical sequence that produces the myth of the Once and Future King, not only in Britain but in several countries across Europe; or the recurring myth that the "real" Czar had escaped from the Court, and was rallying an army to wrest back his throne (a sequence not unknown even in the Roman Empire).

Granted, the examples above pertain to the largest social groups we have built – the nation-states. Recurring patterns in much smaller groups, however, have become clearer in recent decades, such as family abuse repeated through generations. When popular nonfiction titles include Melody Beattie's *Co-Dependent No More* (1987) and Wayne Kraitsberg's *The Adult Children of Alcoholics Syndrome* (1988), at the least, you know that the idea of reiterating, destructive behaviour patterns has sunk into popular culture.

Suggested Methods and Procedures:

I set out to create a symbolic system, to lend rigour to non-mathematical phenomena. The first step was to *specify* – that is, to assign specific symbols or letters to represent individual behaviours, and individual actors (and people acted upon). Of course, the subjects and objects could be groups instead of individuals, but that wasn't going to be the starting point. And the emphasis was going to be on behaviours, not persons; I wanted to follow the ways people behaved, more than I wanted to identify who did what.

Identifying temperament/personality types is a challenge, because probably none of us experiences the full range of human diversity (or perversity). People largely have the character or personality that their first three years of experience leads them to develop. This fact leads to a wide spectrum of personality types, most perfectly expressed in the largest generations. To bring it down to brass tacks: there are only a few villains in any population, probably just as few as there are saints – somewhere between 5% to 15% - but villains, psychopaths, sociopaths shape social institutions and affect social behaviours, quite out of proportion to their numbers. (Can we say the same for saints?)

For a while I thought that perhaps adopting the Myers-Briggs temperament types, and representing them by the runes in the Younger Futhark, would be a useful convention. (It so happens there are 16 temperaments defined in the Myers-Briggs system and 16 runes in the Younger Futhark.) But this is problematic, because any number of personal characteristics not specified by the Myers-Briggs system may influence people's initiatives, or reactions. That number might include the whole set of English adjectives that apply to people – a number rather greater than any alphabet.

Identifying standard actions/reactions is more problematic. For one thing, if there is a standard taxonomy for individual behaviours, social customs, or cultural traits, it can be hard to determine. For another, a list of verbs just from Basic English will exceed the number of letters in the alphabet; this presents an issue for assigning acronymic symbols.

There are several one-thing-leads-to-another stories that almost anyone knows. The sense that there are predictable regularities in human behaviour, both individual and social, has come to more than one mind. Michael Flynn's novel *In the Country of the Blind* is just one of many SF novels about an art or science for describing, even predicting and controlling, individual and mass social behaviour.

Some of the things we come to expect of people include:

- tending to parochialism, provincialism, bigotry, sexism, racism, sectarianism, mindless conservatism, poor spending and dietary choices, and poor dental hygiene, absent education, opportunities, or exposure to other communities
- Abused people becoming abusers
- People who see no other means to prosper becoming career criminals
- Parents, and especially grandparents, unconsciously assuming that speech, dress, and other social behaviour – and the levels of prices and incomes – have *not* changed, even over the course of decades
- Any new policy, social value, or technology immediately calling up fans and foes, regardless of its merits
- believing rather than thinking about public issues
- competing for social status and relative power, even in the middle of disasters
- ignoring physical reality, or believing that facts and physical forces are negotiable, is typical human behaviour
- confusing the higher priority of securing actual resources with the lower priority of political goals
- Rulers and public officials saying anything, distorting any issues, inventing any distraction or indulging in any deceit, just to pacify the majority of the public, to say nothing of protecting their own interests. Ultimately this defines *the level of corruption to which policy-making descends*, varying from one society to another.

The Fundamental System:

The concept at hand was to combine the conventions of symbolic logic, probability theory, and set theory to lend rigour to studies that did not seem basically quantitative, such as sociology or anthropology.

The benefit of using symbolic logic would be that any well-formed statement could be used as a line in a formal argument, and any argument could then be examined for formal validity.

Some conventions from symbolic logic are available, and immediately offer a way to clarify how one action or situation leads to another. In sentence logic, you can use single letters to symbolize a situation; to go into more detail with predicate logic, you can specify actions – or characteristics – of individuals or groups with capitals. The actors (and the people they act upon) will follow in lower-case letters. That is enough for a phrase like Xa or Cby ; connecting the phrases with logical operators - \wedge , \sim , \vee , \supset , \equiv for “and/but”, “not”, “or”, “if-then” or “if-and-only-if” (respectively) would show how we habitually, customarily, go from one action or situation to a reaction, or a result. Call these strings of symbols “formulas”, if you like – because they’re not equations.

There are provisions in symbolic logic for defining whole sets of people and describing rules about them – “universal” (all-or-none) statements – or for describing real situations with one, or some individuals, called “existential” statements. (Note the distinction. Some of the rules of logic can’t be applied, such as those applying to “if-then” or “if-and-only-if” statements, when you can only make existential statements.) There are also provisions in logic for introducing a hypothesis and seeing whether it is proven, or at least supported, by the facts.

In order to define a set or class of real individuals, we may have to borrow conventions from set theory, which again has a symbolic rigour and again has provisions for situations that can’t be described with all-or-nothing rules.

Above all, when we mainly have statistical information available from demographic studies, we may borrow conventions from probability theory; surround a whole formula with brackets and preface it with a P, and *then* you can follow it with an equals sign and a number.

It became clear eventually that my symbolic system began to resemble

$$P_{u,v}(Abc \supset Bcb) = \% \quad (1)$$

where an event Abc (e.g. Bob assaulting Charlie) leads to an event Bcb (Charlie hitting Bob back); but since that result is not certain and universal, we have to hang a probability P on the statement; and since feuds are more traditionally carried on in some places (u) and eras (y), we have to distinguish that probability P from others, with subscripts.

Since even small organizations can have complicated processes, as any game master or event organizer learns, it may be necessary to use multiletter lower-case acronyms for individuals (maybe their initials?) when there are more people in play than there are letters in the alphabet, and distinguish subjects from objects with, say, colons.

$$P_{u,v}(Abd:cf \supset Bcf:bd) = \% \quad (2)$$

Since small-group dynamics and the actions of individuals are not the only subjects at hand, it may be necessary to use multiletter lower-case acronyms to designate whole *classes* of individuals. Fortunately, small caps or underlines or both are available to distinguish them. We may also have to use multiletter *upper*-case acronyms for complex interactions, if the number of interactions outruns the number of letters in the alphabet. For example:

$$P_{u,v}(BAPD:\underline{UC} \supset MC\underline{UC}:\underline{PD}) = \% \quad (3)$$

Where “uc” are minority citizens, “pd” are police, BA is broadcast incidents of abuse (by police, of minority citizens), and “MC” stands for a media protest campaign (by the minority citizens, against systemic abuse).

Tentative Conclusions:

Already you can see where I departed from creating a useful tool. Quite aside from being an involved and time-consuming practice for something that real people do intuitively, in their heads, on the fly ... I am not aware of any generally-accepted taxonomy of behavioral psychology, let alone social behaviours in sociology or anthropology. Maybe *you* know something more about this?

It also didn't work because *I don't perceive human interactions accurately*, which is the raw data to input. I get confused and agitated and demoralized in challenging and confusing situations, which is just when it is most important to keep track of who is doing and saying what.

Most of all, it doesn't work because *I don't have a way to deduce missing information* from what is visible to me. Too much of what is going on is simply occult, unaccountable, inconsistent, and impossible to deal with.

Anyway, writers like John Barnes have shown that there are schools of sociology and economics which do, actually, have a strong emphasis on factual and mathematical rigour. That suggests that, like a classic crank theory, the one I kept turning to was neither necessary, nor useful.

##

Does the foregoing help you recognize when someone is indulging in a crank theory?

References:

- Anderson, Poul. *The Psychotechnic League*. New York: Tor Books, 1981. (pb)
- Asimov, Isaac. *Foundation, Foundation and Empire, Second Foundation* (1951). New York: Heinemann/Octopus Books, 1981. (7th printing)
- Beattie, Melody. *Co-Dependent No More*. New York: Harper & Row, 1987.
- Brunner, John. *The Squares of the City*. [1965]. New York: Collier/Macmillan, 1991. (pb)
- Cherryh, C.J. *Cyteen: The Betrayal*. New York: Warner Books, 1988. (pb)
- *Cyteen: The Rebirth*. New York: Warner Books, 1988. (pb)
- *Cyteen: The Vindication*. New York: Warner Books, 1988. (pb)
- Flynn, Michael. *In The Country of the Blind*. New York: Baen Books, 1990. (pb)
- Heinlein, Robert A. "Solution Unsatisfactory." *Expanded Universe*. Riverdale, NY: Baen Publishing Enterprises, 2005. (pb)
- "Blowups Happen" (© 1940). *The Past Through Tomorrow*. New York: Berkeley, 1975.
- "Methuselah's Children" (© 1941, © 1958). *The Past Through Tomorrow*. New York: Berkeley, 1975.
- Kingsbury, Donald. *The Moon Goddess and the Son*. New York: Baen Books, 1986.
- Kritsberg, Wayne. *The Adult Children of Alcoholics Syndrome*. New York: Bantam, 1988.
- "The Social Sciences," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1989), Vol. 27, pp. 365- 405.
- Sheffield, Charles. *Divergence*. New York: Del Rey, 1991. (pb)
- Smith, L. Neil. *Tom Paine Maru*. New York: Del Rey, 1984. (pb)
- Yarbro, Chelsea Quinn. *Blood Games*. New York: Tor Books, 1980.

THE WORLD GOVERNMENT OF SPUZZUM WANTS YOU!

If national governments are riddled with flaws, maybe we need more of the same at a global level, to keep them in line! But we need local reps in every continent and region to write for and distribute INTERESTING TIMES, the only paper that speaks for the whole world!

COME to our next meeting at a café near you! HEAR members describe their harrowing confrontations with online humorists, like the Royal Swiss Navy, and obstructionists like Monsanto and the Putin administration!

Contact gartho(at)vcn.bc.ca and start your adventure today!

Letters

Hrothgar Weems, Octembruary 32, 2015

Dear Sir,

There is no truth to the rumour I am being paid to deny. I wasn't there, I didn't do it, you can't make me, and it's not my problem. You just leave me alone, I'll leave you alone, and we won't have to worry about restraining orders or weapons of mass destruction agreements.

((Agreed.))

Ernest Wolfgang Friedrich Siegfried Gunther Klaus Inger Stroheim Ruprecht Hentzau Schleswig Holstein Trish-trash-am-Wiesen von Ulm, Octembruary 33, 2015

When are you going to publish my treatise on the international threat represented by Belgium?

((When you chop it down to a reasonable size, like my submission guidelines state. Also I can't afford to translate it from German, or whatever language you write in.))

Tepes & Bathory Barristers & Solicitors, Octembruary 34, 2015

On behalf of our client, Torri Bupkis, we request and require that you cease and desist from publication of the events of 1982-83 in Spuzzum, B.C., and send to our office any materials, whether typed, handwritten, digital or on audiotape concerning her affairs ...

((Try and make me.))

JOIN THE ROYAL SWISS NAVY!

The many! The humble! The least dangerous social warriors on the Internet!

COME to our next meeting at a café near you! HEAR members describe their harrowing confrontations with online terrorists, their covert Thugee masters, and the worldwide Belgian conspiracy behind them all! CHOOSE a military title you are completely not entitled to hold!

Contact gartho(at)vcn.bc.ca and start your adventure today!

Reviews

California Twist, by John Connor. Murderous-Ink Press: Stevenage, Herts., England. © 2013. (price unstated.)

Harry Rhimes, P.I., is a man out of place in several ways. An American raised in England and returned to California, a veteran of British armed service working as a private investigator, he finds himself following a mere missing-fiancé investigation that leads to a drug-distribution

ring ... then, to a succession of murders ... finally, to several manipulative deceptions, by the fiancé and his father among others ...

(order from murderous-ink.co.uk)

Rarity from the Hollow, by Robert Eggleton. Dog Horn Publishing, U.K.: © 2012. (price unstated.)

In *Rarity from the Hollow*, a child prodigy in a troubled family and troubled Appalachian community encounters aliens – which may be the aliens' undoing.

Lacy Dawn lives in a small town suffering all the results of no economic base – poverty, poor education, low employment, and domestic abuse. Her parents and teachers are oblivious to the help she is giving other children, not only by coaching her friend Faith in spelling, but in healing the physical and emotional traumas of her schoolmates. The children quite matter-of-factly accept her help as magic, the same way they accept the poverty, ignorance, domestic violence and sexual abuse in their lives.

Lacy Dawn has a secret: her friend DotCom, an alien who tells her she has a mission in life. He has a mission of his own – to develop Earth as a market for the Mall, a familiar, yet alien capitalist economy.

But DotCom and the Mall may have a surprise coming. When the Appalachians discover the aliens, they develop their own plans to capitalize on the aliens ...

Rarity from the Hollow is distributed in the United Kingdom by: Central Books, 99 Wallis Road, London, E9 5LN, United Kingdom, orders@centralbooks.com

