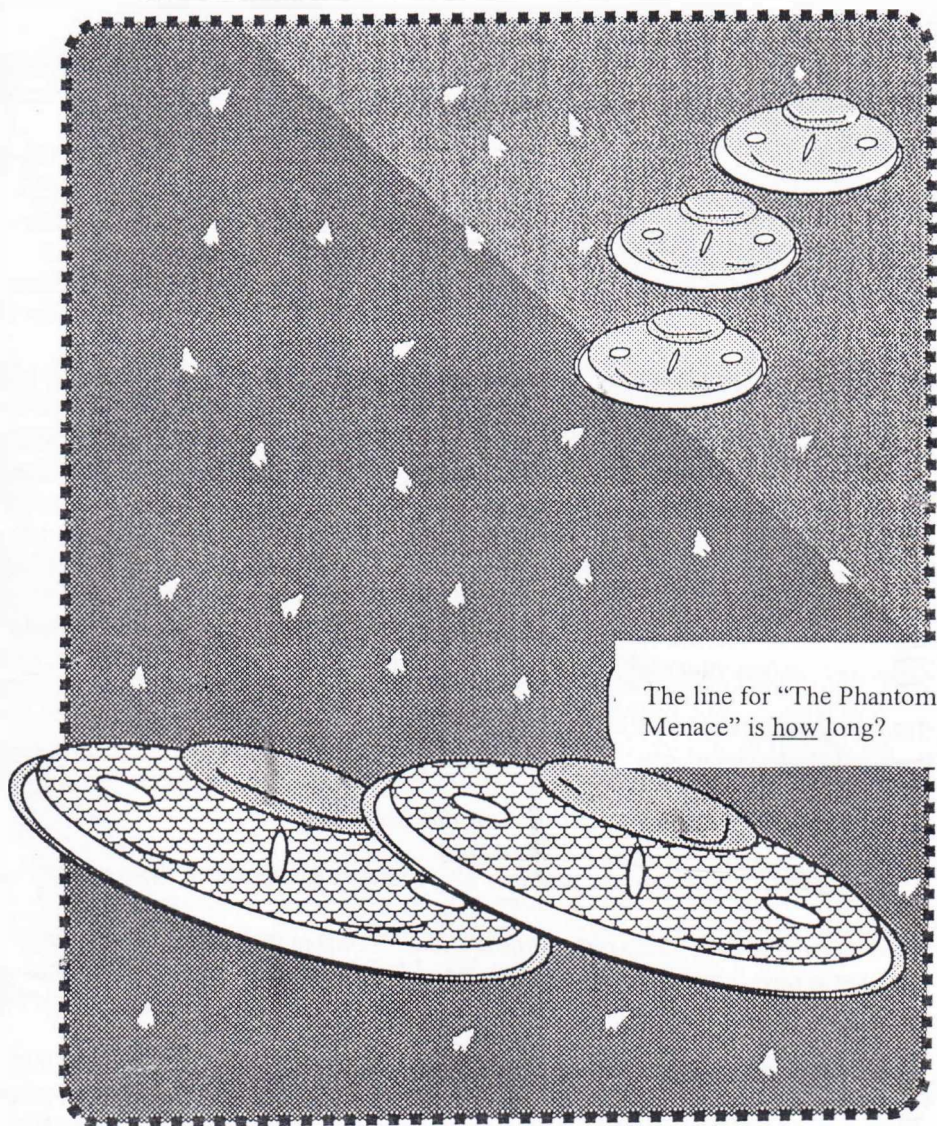


Pulsar

Still Only 40 Cents!

The Newsletter of the Portland Science Fiction Society



May 1999 (really, this time)

Issue 247

TIMELINE

Compiled by Sam Butler (President and Still Champ'n—ed.)

PorSFIS holds a formal meeting on the second Saturday of each month—usually these are structured and have a program. After the meeting we adjourn to a social place for snacks, drinks and socialization. Some folks gather after the meeting for dinner at the place listed in the timeline.

There are often a social gathering in varying locations on the fourth Saturday. Lately this has been a video party at the home of two of our members. Everyone is welcome to both.

Saturday May 8, 1999	PorSFIS Meeting	2 P.M.
Portland State University	Room 229	Smith Memorial Center

GUEST SPEAKER: Ru Emerson

Rumor has it that Ru will be talking about stuff. Also on hand she will be displaying cover art for her latest XENA The Warrior Princess Novels. Come and see what stuff is, or else.

AFTERS: Market Street Pub SW 10th & Market Street

Join us after the meeting for a social bit of drinking and eating and talking at a reasonable venue. If this is your first meeting then the drink is on us, well the price of the drink is on the clubs tab.

Saturday May 22 PorSFIS Social Event The Other Video PorSFIS Event

There again will be movies at Jim & Linda Pilcher's apartment. Call for details: 236-0349. Bring your own munchies, etc. They usually start at 7 PM

Saturday June 12, 1999	PorSFIS Meeting	2 P.M.
Portland State University	Room 229	Smith Memorial Center

Guest will be: Cat Faber Filker and Microbiologist

SO WE HAD A NEW PERSON WHO ATTENDED A PORSFIS MEETING

Despite the offer below no old members showed up at the February meeting, however a new person did and received the traditional free drink. What kept you away? So we'll repeat the invitation:

As an added incentive, if you've never been to a PorSFIS meeting before, if it's been over a year and you are a member since you've attended a meeting you will be eligible for there will be a **free** beverage of your choice at the AFTER's after [naturally] the meeting, but you do have to come to the meeting, coming to the after's doesn't merit the free drink.

PRESIDENTS QUOTES:

FIRST SUBJECT: DUES ARE DUE

With the exception of several people in the club who have multiyear, or 'lifetime memberships' all memberships will expire on the last day of March 1999. Remember to bring your money to the meeting, or mail it to the Post Office address. Newsletters received this month will be the last ones sent to you unless you renew your membership.

SECOND SUBJECT: Let's TALK Responsibility

As some of you might know, and others will learn I am attempting to focus my energies on other things rather than the PorSFIS nuts-and-bolts at this time. In order to do this I've passed the baton of orchestrating the meetings to Debra to see if she, is morally, orally and officially dead ooopps, capable of doing this will I progress along a secret project for PorSFIS, details of which should be forthcoming in a couple of months, or not. **(Hey, wait a minute!—ed.)**

MOVIE REVIEW THE MATRIX

Okay, by now you've probably gone to see the movie. The first thing that I'll say is that it was hard at times to remember that this was Keanu Reeves, he actually seemed to act a bit and not just be there. Of course, many movie stars that are legends just 'be there' so perhaps

Well that must have been a dream, and not something real, right? I don't think that there was any plot concept that was new to science fiction fans, and there certainly were plenty of, whoops could have driven a truck through that logic, and why is kick-boxing and flying leaps so prevalent in fights, why don't they just hit each other with their fists and fight like men? More showy, I know the answer already.

This is a fast past action filled thriller, the questions of reality and what is really real and what might be real are explored, but what is explored the most is special effects, and there certainly are a nice lot of them. Expect the level of good effects to continue to grow in the field of motion pictures.

The best part:

Well I finally got to see the trailers for STAR WARS I, I'd heard a lot about them, almost downloaded them on the internet, but at an hour long download time, I balked. Was it worth the wait, yes, I got to see it all, got to see it on a really big screen and with a much better sound system than my computer at home. The downside, well I can't watch it again, at least not until the video comes out. Where will I be May 19, well probably not in line, have to work, and I imagine it'll be a week or more before I get there, now if we could just pass out memberships to those standing in line we'd have a lot of PorSFIS members wouldn't we?

It's been a long ways from hanging around in a science fiction book store 22 years ago discussing the symbolism of a little movie from the guy that had directed "American Graffiti."

MOVIE REVIEW: The Bicycle Thief

For the most part I don't go to a lot of science fiction films, you can ask why, I think the answer is pretty obvious. Since I first found films to be an immensely enjoyable experience I had heard of THE BICYCLE THIEF. I finally saw it, and discovered that it was everything that everyone said about it.

This film made in 1948 in Italy is a wonder. Non-actors were used for the most part, most of the film was filmed out of the studio in the streets and despite this, this film is an excellent story. If you love movies you should seek this out if you haven't seen it already.

TELEVISION REVIEW:

There do seem to be a number of science fiction programmes on television now. Personally I tend to avoid the "BIG STRONG HEROES", "PARANOIA IS PERFECTLY ACCEPTABLE AND TRUE" type programs. So what do I watch: well lately I've been watching "Total Recall" which shows on SHOWTIME just before "STAR GATE" and "THE OUTER LIMITS". I've also started watching "FARSCAPE" on the SCI-FI channel.

So what do I recommend for free television? I still like "3rd Rock From the Sun" but it is less and less about aliens on earth and just odd earth people in a sitcom. I still worship at the altar of RODDENBERRY, but do weary of the extremely long story arc. I wait, and wait, and wait, it seems in eternity for the next B5 incarnation and keep forgetting to watch the reruns to catch those one or two episodes that I missed.

Creating Uber Plants in Space

by Kristen Philipkoski

<http://www.wired.com/news/news/technology/story/19227.html>

3:00 a.m. 21.Apr.99.PDT

Scientists may have taken a giant leap for mankind's effort to genetically improve plants. All they had to do was move their tests to space.

The slim odds of successfully transferring desirable genes into plants get a whole lot better, it seems, when you remove gravity from the mix.

An industry-sponsored research project conducted last year aboard the NASA space shuttle Discovery suggests that microgravity might enhance the genetic engineering of plants. The project, coordinated by the Wisconsin Center for Space Automation and Robotics (WCSAR), tested a unique technology that uses bacteria for transferring genes.

"The level of genetic transfer from infection was way beyond our expectations," said Ray Bula, a former director of WCSAR. "We thought if we could double the rate of transfer seen on earth, it would have been promising."

The genetic-transfer success rate, typically about one in a thousand on Earth, was increased more than tenfold compared to a control experiment conducted on Earth, Bula said.

Gene-transfer techniques are increasingly important to the agriculture industry, as it looks for faster and more selective alternatives to complement traditional plant breeding. For example, according to Bula, during the current growing season, genetically engineered varieties are expected to make up 70 percent of all soybeans planted in the United States.

"We will be growing crops in the future for more than just food, clothing, or energy," said Bula. "Medical vaccines can be incorporated into plants to provide natural protection from disease. Genes that can make plants resistant to insects will greatly reduce chemical pesticide use."

Collaborators in the mission included the Indiana Crop Improvement Association (ICIA); the Cross Plains, Wisconsin, biotechnology firm Rapigen LLC; and the University of Toledo, Ohio. Researchers from Toledo developed the gene-transfer process, and the ICIA is interested in applying the results to new soybean crops. Bula is optimistic, but cautions that the experiment needs to be refined and repeated to ensure that the seedlings survive.

After slightly damaging the meristem, or growing tissue region, of plant seedlings, bacteria that carry the desired gene are placed in a solution around the plant and incorporated into the cells. All subsequent plant parts derived from the cells will carry the desired trait.

Normally, the bacteria simply die off without harming the plant. But the rate of infection was so high in microgravity that it blocked the plants' vascular systems. Bula said that the problem may be corrected in future missions by using fewer bacteria than are needed on Earth.

Bula said that cell materials do not settle in microgravity, which allows more freedom of movement. With a minimum of physical factors to limit the mobility of bacteria, they hit their targets more easily.

The gene transferred in the experiment was a marker gene, which is fluorescent and easily tracked. Future experiments will transfer a gene that has been shown to relieve certain human autoimmune diseases.

Thirty percent of the International Space Station that is now being assembled in orbit is dedicated to private commercial use and could be tapped for plant genetic engineering.

I THINK WE'RE ALL BOZOS AT THE ALADDIN

The Firesign Theatre, that madcap gang of audio comedians from the late 60s and early 70s, has reunited! They appeared at the Aladdin Theatre right here in River City on April 24-27, and I was thrilled to be able to catch the April 24 show. By happy coincidence Kate and I wound up with seats right next to John Lorentz and Ruth Sachter in the front row of the balcony; Sam Butler was also in the audience that night.

The Firesigns -- Peter Bergman, Phil Austin, Philip Proctor, and David Ossman-- are the creators of massively popular comedy albums such as "Waiting for the Electrician or Someone Like Him," "Don't Crush That Dwarf, Hand Me the Pliers," and "I Think We're All Bozos on this Bus." They originated the catchphrases "He's no fun, he fell right over" and "How can you be in two places at once when you're not anywhere at all?" and the character Nick Danger, Third Eye. Their comedy is intellectual, multi-layered, full of non sequiturs and subtle malapropisms. And drugs. As Ruth commented, one big difference between this show and the last one she'd seen, back in the 70s, was that you could see the stage (with no intervening cloud of greenish smoke). But I wouldn't class the Firesigns as "drug comedians" like Cheech & Chong; the drug references are just a sign of the times and the subculture in which the albums were produced.

Yes, it has been a few years since those vinyl albums were pressed. Ossman's gone gray, and Bergman's bald as an egg. But they've still got an irreverent spark, and their new album "Give Me Immortality or Give Me Death!" is a cutting commentary on pop culture, advertising, and the radio business at the Turn of the Millenium.

The show started off with my favorite Firesign production, the "Wall of Science" sequence from "Bozos." It began with the performers standing rather placidly behind music stands, but as it went on they came out onto the stage and loped about, portraying La Brea Man, Plow Man, Civilized Man, and all the rest of the historic characters Up Against the Wall of Science.

The ending of the sequence was cleverly re-engineered into a reference to the Y2K computer bug. This segued nicely into an excerpt from "Give Me Immortality," which is set on the evening of 12/31/99 -- oops, I mean 12/31/1999 -- and flowed from there into the "car bit" from "How Can You Be In Two Places" ("Antelope Freeway, 1/256th Mile") and then into the war movie, "Babes in Khaki," from "Don't Crush That Dwarf". Minimal props and costumes were used to good effect.

At the end of the first act I was feeling rather disappointed. I knew all this material by heart -- in some cases, better than the Firesigns themselves, as there were a few flubbed lines -- and the live performance suffered by comparison with the rapid-fire delivery and multi-track audio of the albums themselves. It's a truism of Firesignology that you have to listen to the albums over and over in order to get all the offhand references and background commentary, but with just four voices everything was right out in the open.

Furthermore, they were enunciating carefully and deliberately, as if to be sure everyone in the audience got every joke.

This reduced the overwhelming rush of information and the "aha!" of catching an obscure bit that are big parts of the thrill of Firesign for me. The experience was also somewhat hampered by the audience chanting along with well-remembered lines and phrases (OK, I admit it, I was chanting right along with them), but the performers took it well in stride.

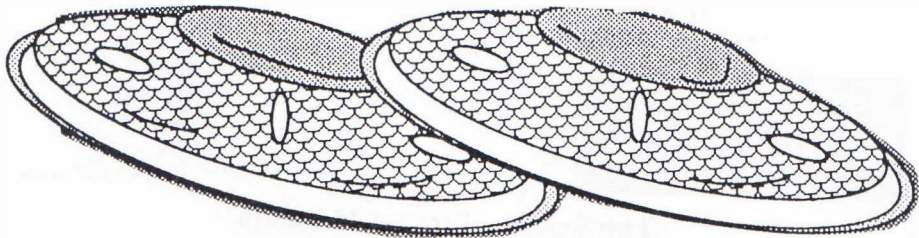
In the second act, though, they really put the pedal to the metal as they presented their classic "Nick Danger, Third Eye" from the "How Can You Be" album. This performance was accented with sound effects (rocks in a balloon for thunder, crunching a box of cornstarch for walking in snow), and the Firesigns seemed to be loosening up, having fun with the material. They incorporated local references, dealt well with unscripted situations (after one audience chant-along, Nick Danger (Austin) fixed us with a steely eye, hooked a thumb at his chest, and intoned "*I'll* handle this"), and even played jokes on each other: at one point Ossman took over some of Proctor's lines, which nearly cracked Austin up completely.

"Nick Danger" was followed by the rarely-heard "Shakespeare's Lost Comedie," which sent the troupe bounding across the stage with a comparative wealth of costumes and props and left the audience gasping for breath. The evening concluded with another sequence from "Give Me Immortality" and a toast to the end of the Millenium and the beginning of the next.

I left the theatre satisfied and upbeat. It's good to have the Four Or Five Crazy Guys back. They let us know that, yes, the world *is* as weird as we think it is. And even if those vinyl albums have been transferred to CDs and Nick Danger's flowing hair has gone completely white, irreverence, malapropisms, and obscure cultural references are still your best entertainment value. Shoes for Industry!

David D. Levine, davidl@co.intel.com

Visit the OSFCI Home Page: <http://www.osfci.org/>



THE SCIENCE FICTION MUSEUM'S

premier party for

STAR WARS

EPISODE I

THE PHANTOM MENACE.

In the courtyard of the Lloyd Center Cinemas
on May 19, 1999

Events will include a free Costume contest and a free 'sound-alike' contest
(for those who don't costume)

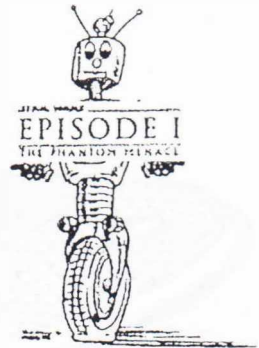
Come see the KUFO Hummer!

Come one, come all (you're going to be there anyway),
Sign up for the free drawings*
Try your luck with the trivia questions

*Must be present to win.

Shows begin at 12:01am
Contest sign-up begins at 1pm in the courtyard
Preliminary judging begins around 2pm
Final judging begins at 5pm

Judges include:
Dark Horse editor Mike Hansen
Local costumer Ann Hoffert



The Science Fiction Museum

PO Box 18091
Salem, OR 97305-8091
sfmuseum@aol.com

The 22nd Northwest SF Convention

Anthony Ward

The 22nd NorWesCon was held over the Easter weekend at the SeaTac DoubleTree Inn. IMHO, it was a very nice con. However, to keep my honor intact, I must tell you I was a panelist on three panels and worked as a volunteer for most of the weekend, so I may be prejudiced.

The con started on Thursday afternoon. John Andrews and I arrived at about 1400. I spent most of the afternoon fixing food for the rest of the worker bees who were setting up the con. In fact, I spent a majority of my time fixing food this year. I was lucky to work with some good people, so I actually had fun.

The theme for this year's NorWesCon was alternate history. Harry Turtledove, a Byzantine historian and science fiction author, was Writer Guest of Honor. Dr. Turtledove has written some very good alternate history books, and he is a great speaker-to-fans. I attended four of his panels and enjoyed all of them.

On Friday, I was on a panel on the future of military technology, another on alternate history novels, and finally a panel on why the science in SF movies sucks. (The last panel was more elegantly titled in the program book.) I enjoyed being on all three and all three had a lot of audience participation. All the panels I went to had a lot of audience participation. Fandom is filled with smart people who have a lot of axes to grind. <g>

I missed the masquerade on Saturday night as I went to supper with some non-fanish friends. But the rest of my evenings and nights were taken up with filk singing. This has been one of the weak spots in past NorWesCons. And they still haven't gotten the filk program down as good as Orycon does. I did sing out until 0200 every night and I did have fun, but their filk programming still needs more work.

The Dealers Room was pretty good with a wide selection of goods. I bought several books, but book dealers were only about 15% of the room. The art show was much better than last year, but still not up to Orycon standards. I still enjoyed many of the paintings and the 3-D work was outstanding.

Over all, I liked this year's NorWesCon. It seemed to be well organized and mostly ran smoothly. I also enjoyed this year's theme of alternate history. This con still has a very high turn out of Goth and B&D fans, which leads to some very interesting hall costumes. I joined next year's NorWesCon and hope I have as much fun as I did this year.

Mr Know-It-All

A Ms CM of San Jose asks: Why is the UK the big holdout in the European Community for converting over to use of the euro?

The British feel that everybody else should simply convert to using pound sterling.

A Ms KW of Olalla asks: Back in the days of LP records, I remember hearing that some of these records had hidden messages; that, if these records were played backwards you could hear demonic sounds. Is there any truth to this?

Most definitely, especially if you are using home equipment, most LP records, when played backwards, would produce the demonic sounds of the record grooves being mauled and the phonograph needle being warped.

A Mr EJ of Blaine asks: is it true that, if improvements in automobiles had kept pace with improvements in computers that we all would drive cars that got 1000 miles to the gallon?

Yes; we also would drive cars that suddenly stop and lock up for no reason; that, when the brake is applied, would first ask 'Are you sure? y/n'; and that would have a submenu under 'edit' in place of a steering wheel.

With this edition we start a new feature. Mr Know-it-all offers some of the most challenging questions in his vast repertoire of knowledge. Answer next month, or when he feels like it.

Mr Know-It-All's Exceedingly Esoteric Question of the Month:

What do the following letters, or letter-shapes, have in common?
ABEKMHOPTX

Are you waiting in line yet?

Do you intend to?
Can't take the time off from work?

Well, look no further! Those nice people at Scifi.com are bringing the virtual experience your way. Just go to their website and click on the icon and sign up for your own Virtual Fan. Keep him happy and alive until the premiere, and you might just win a shopping spree at the Scifi.com's store!

Attention, Attention!

Borders Books & Music in Downtown Portland is having a free panel discussion on May 11 at 7 p.m. with Timothy Zahn, K.W. Jeter, Steve Perry and Kristine Rusch. They will be discussing their Star Wars books as well as their other books.

And Since We're a Cultured Lot:

ARTFORCE

Saturday, May 15 at 4 p.m. - Jefferson High School Auditorium, 5210 N. Kerby

What is ArtFORCE?

ArtFORCE is a demonstration of dance, music and martial arts that will be staged to benefit the magnet arts programs at Jefferson High School, including the nationally renowned Jefferson Dancers. ArtFORCE includes performances of taekwon-do, aikido, kung-fu, karate, kendo and t'ai chi, plus dance routines by the Jefferson Dancers and the Modern Dance Lab.

Why is ArtFORCE happening?

A group of martial arts instructors are concerned about the level of arts funding in public schools and particularly about the possible loss of the Jefferson Dancers, which has been a great asset to the city of Portland. We have all taken oaths as black belts to work to build a more peaceful world and contribute to our communities. This seems to be a logical connection, in that dance and martial arts have so much in common. It is our goal to raise \$5,000 to help fund the dancers and the other magnet arts programs at Jefferson.

Who is in ArtFORCE?

Martial arts students-mainly children and teenagers, as well as the performers from the Jefferson Dancers. The martial arts schools and instructors share a strong commitment to sound, traditional martial arts. They are reputable, well-established schools with high standards. You will see excellent demonstrations of each art.

Info on tickets:

Tickets are \$10.00 for adults, \$5.00 for seniors and children age 12 and under. Tickets are available at the School of Traditional Taekwon-do, and also at Music Millennium. They also will be available at the door unless the show sells out. For more information, please contact: Gil Johnson, 736-9634; e-mail: gilj@hurrah.com

PO Box 4602
Portland, OR 97208

Pulsar, the newsletter of the Portland Science Fiction Society (PorSFis), comes free with membership. It is also available in trade with other fanzines, and can be purchased at Excalibur Books, Future Dreams/Burnside and Looking Glass Books, all in Portland, Oregon.

Your editor has been Debra Stansbury. Next month's editor is the same. Deadline is generally the 20th of every month. Contributions are always welcome, and may be sent to the PO Box above, or to the editor direct at debstans@canada.com

PorSFis meetings are open to everyone. Check the Timeline for meeting times and places. Membership per year: \$20 individual, \$30 family (1 newsletter)

Current PorSFis Officers:

President	Sam Butler	(503) 289-2670
Vice Pres.	Debra Stansbury	
Treasurer	John Andrews	(503) 771-2894
Secretary	Chuck Leon	

PORSFIS INFORMATION TELEPHONE: 727-3570

PORSFIS WEBPAGE: <http://www.europa.com/~jpilcher/>



Trade

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