

Pulsar

The Newsletter of the Portland Science Fiction Society

Still Only 40 Cents!



June 1999

Issue 248

TIMELINE

Compiled by Sam Butler

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

GUEST SPEAKER: Cat Faber

Noted local filker/molecular scientist (she's ½ of Echo's Children and a fine person in her own right) will be here. She is going to be singing, and telling where she's gotten her ideas for her songs.

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 June 26 PorSFis Social Event The Other Video PorSFis Event
Change in plans! Note from Linda Pilcher

In reference to June Movie Night, while the details are not completely settled, it is very likely that we will not be having movie night at our house in June. Since the night falls just before Patty (Wells) and my Jim's mutual birthday, we will probably forgo Movie Night for the Birthday and move movie night to Marc and Patty's and make it The Birthday. Call for information: 236-0349

NEXT MEETING:

Saturday July 10, 1999	PorSFis Meeting	2 P.M.
Portland State University	Room 229	Smith Memorial Center

Guest will be: announced

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: THE PICNIC

As of this time we are in negotiation for the picnic with the picnic providers. When details are known they will be published. Thank you

SECOND SUBJECT: DISCUSSION OF MOVIES

Sure to raise a hackle, I still mention this. As those who were at the meeting noted I attempted to bring about a discussion of THE MATRIX, hitherto a forbidden discussion subject due to the gag rule. As I suspected the gag rule was still in effect mostly due to: 'gosh it's been so long since we saw the movie we don't remember it', at least thjat's how I read it. So again I ask the question: what's the point of suspending discussion of movies at a meeting when later when the suspended period of time is over and no one wants to discuss 'old news'. I can certainly understand if the movie opens the day or week before the meeting, but now days with cinema screens a lot more spread out over Portland it's very easy to see the movie.

I saw Star Wars: The Phantom Menace on Friday, just on the 3rd day of release. I stood in line about 5 minutes before I got in, true I bought my ticket the day before, but there I wasn't in that line more than 5 minutes. I got to see it at 7 PM Friday evening what I'd consider prime viewing hour and even got a nice seat, row 4 near the middle. Ok, maybe a little close for some of you, but I sure never saw those pesky "EXIT" signs out of the corner of my eyes. Which leads us to:

MOVIE REVIEW STAR WARS: THE PHANTOM MENACE

Okay, by now you've probably gone to see the movie, not because the lines got any shorter, but because you knew if you didn't others would talk about it. The first thing that I'll say is that it was hard at times to remember that this was George Lucas first movie in years, and about the 4th [I think] movie that he's ever directed. Gosh, he still loves those old serial type wipes between scenes doesn't he?, at least there didn't seem to be that many of them.

What did I like, well the special effects were pretty special. What didn't I like: well the JEDI council seemed pretty stupid. So in tune with the FORCE that they couldn't see the stirrings of the Dark Side even when the personage of its latest rise was right in their face. And why was Yoda at the party at the end on Naboo instead of on the main capital planet. Senator Palaptine, who did he represent, was he Naboo's senator.

Yes I know that the actor who voiced Jar Jar Binks came up with the vocalizations, but Jamaica/Reggae talk/speak was too much. And was I the only one that thought that the Trade Federation sounded like they had Italian/Scilian Accents, were they the Mafia? Oh please, oh please. I know that some reviewers are complaining "It's about trade routes, oh really". Well it's about power, obtaining power, and the method used by individuals to obtain that power.

Did I enjoy the movie? Always a valid question. The answer is yes. Was I expecting more, answer is also yet. Star Wars was a real real good trip. The Phantom Menace was a good trip. My recommendation: if you haven't seen THE MATRIX, is go see it. At least you won't know the ending and there's some good characterization and writing involved, as well as some complexity. Maybe George will find a scriptwriter, evidently he's not been looking all that much in the last 17 years.

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

MR KNOW-IT-ALL

A MR JA of Lacey asks:

Where do forest rangers go to get away from it all?

Downtown Manhattan.

A M GC of Paris asks:

The French have laboured to keep their language pure, unlike you English who mis-appropriate words from every tongue on earth. We even have been firm in the face of a barrage of computer terms. Now, however, with this World-Wide Web thing using English instead of French (as any civilised people would) as the default language, the flood-gates are open. Is there any hope to maintain the purity of the French language?

Please remember that it is the Americans, with their gauche dialect of real English, that have foisted this Web stuff on the civilised world. Also bear in mind that, in 1066, it was one of your princes known as William the Bastard, later William the Conqueror, who overthrew our existing House of Angles and Saxons and imposed Norman French on the language. It appears to be mainly these Norman loan words of ours which you French now are complaining about. In other words, I fail to appreciate your concern; at the time of the Conquest, we borrowed many of your words--900 some years later, we now are merely returning them to their rightful owner.

A Ms JK of Port Orford asks:

What does the phrase 'Tourist Season' really refer to?

I am not certain, but keep in mind that 'Duck Season' refers to that period of time in which it is legal to take a rifle and shoot ducks.

Mr Know-It-All's esoteric question of the month:
Which planet is furthest from the sun?

You can reach Mr Know-it-all in care of the Pulsar or
at rwells@mailcity.com.

Er, what is tha?

Oh ... you want the answer to last month's question.

Very well, if you insist:

Letters with the shapes ABEKMHOPX occur in all three of the Greek, Latin, and Cyrillic alphabets. H, for example, is the Greek eta or long E, and the Cyrillic N. (In several of her little mysteries, Dame Agatha Christie made use of plots in which people confused the Russian N for the Latin H.)

THE NEW MASTERCARD COMMERCIAL...

Lockheed F-16 Fighting Falcon Jet - \$25 million

Lockheed F-117 Nighthawk Stealth Fighter - \$45 million

Boeing B-52 Stratofortress - \$74 million

Brand new B-2 Stealth Bomber - \$2.1 billion

A decent map of downtown Belgrade - Priceless.

There are some things that money can't buy ... Unfortunately good intelligence isn't one of them. (unless you're at Los Alamos)

For the rest, there's MasterCard, the official card of the 19 member NATO alliance and those who believe that sometimes you just need to blow up something in order to restore world peace.

INFORMATION FOR BOOK LOVERS (gee, I don't think I know any....)
Book signings June 12 at Wayside Books & Video 720 W. Main St. Battle Ground, WA 98604 by: Irene Radford and Mike Moscoe

TRIVIA QUESTION:

Who is in the news lately, despite dying in 1975, and almost winning a Hugo for his first novel in 1961? And what current movie is based on another of his books? (Hint, it's the reason he's been in the news lately)

Daniel F. Galouye (Walter M. Miller Jr.'s "A Canticle For Leibowitz" won) and how many of you have read his books? (See reviews for answer to the other half of the question)

REVIEWS

By Doug Muir

I've only seen two movies in the last few weeks; loved one, hated the other.

Hate was reserved, alas, for "The Phantom Menace". **Spoilers follow -- beware!**

"The Phantom Menace"

George Lucas hasn't written a movie in sixteen years, and he long since passed into that celestial realm where no one would ever dare edit him.

It showed. This movie had a feeble plot, even weaker dialogue than the first trilogy, and characters that were either flat or intensely annoying. Lucas had some seriously excellent actors to work with here, and he managed to almost entirely fritter their talents away.

There were minor annoyances as well as major ones. Darth Maul, a villain of tremendous potential, got half a dozen "yes master" lines, killed Liam Neeson and died. Anakin Skywalker had an immaculate conception (no, really) (glyph of eyes rolling). Oh, and all the bad guys have stupid, racial-stereotype accents.

We won't even go into the commercial aspect. Granted, that was already pretty bad by the end of the first trilogy. But in this one, I found myself murmuring, "Action figure... merchandising tie-in... more action figures... on sale this Christmas..."

Except they might not be. If my suburban Connecticut audience was typical, the movie-viewing world is going to be somewhat underwhelmed by this film. Lots of enthusiasm standing in line and going in -- people *wanted* to like this movie. Coming out two hours later, the same people were... quiet.

Anything to like? Oh sure. I didn't feel my eight bucks was *completely* wasted when I got to spend ninety minutes watching a gajillion bucks worth of fairly cool CGI. The pod race sequence was as good as advertised. You could have some fun counting sly references to the trilogy (I started around halfway through, and counted at least fifteen). A few mildly neat revelations (hey, guess who built C-3PO!).

But it still felt like someone had spent a hundred million bucks to put a first draft on the screen.

If I could change one thing? Make Anakin Skywalker three or four years older. A just prepubescent 12-year-old might perhaps have worked in this role. Having an 8-year-old blow up the D/e/a/t/h/ S/t/a/r/ droid army controller was just silly.

(The other movie wasn't SF related, so it didn't get included here)

Oh, and I read some books too.

HELM by Stephen Gould. Good old-fashioned meat-and-potatoes SF about a Lost Colony(tm) where certain useful traditions have been... strongly encouraged... by mind-control tech used on the original settlers. It's a fairly standard fallen-back-to-medieval world, but with a few interesting twists.

Mm, don't want to give too many spoilers here... well, adolescent hero (younger son of a major nobleman), gets tangled up with a high tech Artifact (the eponymous Helm) left over from the first wave of colonists. It puts something in his mind, and complications ensue.

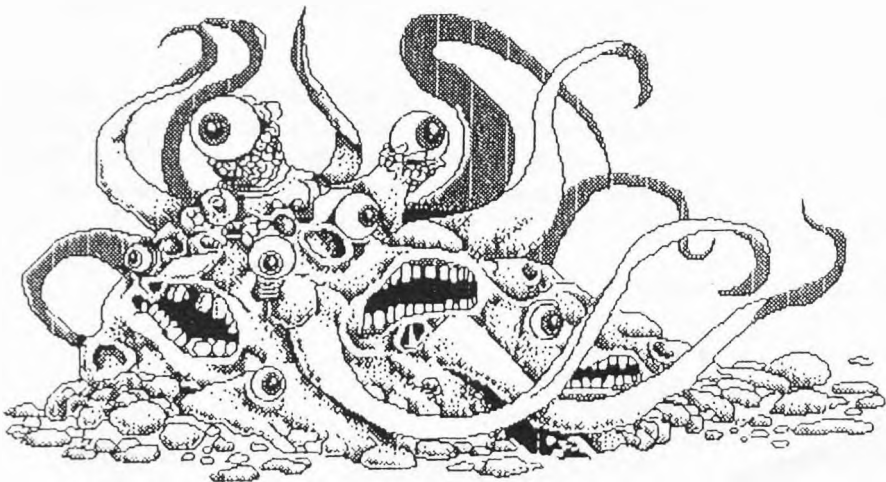
It's pretty standard stuff, and I do have some quibbles with the details (could a population of half a million people on a recently terraformed planet really support a complex feudal system and annual wars? And I wish he'd stop giving us super-duper-hypercompetent teenagers for protagonists). But Gould shows that the standard stuff can still get up and boogie; he took some time with this and had some fun, and it shows. Watch for the Dance of the Food Groups...

Gould wrote one of the best first SF novels of the last 20 years (Jumper); he followed it up with Wildside, which was okay to good. This one falls between the two, which means it's well worth a look.

OUR DUMB CENTURY by the Onion. If you don't know about the Onion, wander over to www.theonion.com and check it out. It's a parody newspaper, and it's really good.

This is their first book, and it's a collection of parody newspaper articles from the last 100 years -- from 1901 ("To-day's Extinctions: Northern Pond Shrew, Western Furred Owl...") through 1912 ("World's Largest Metaphor Strikes Iceberg"), 1947 ("CIA denies CIA founding"), 1963 ("Kennedy slain by CIA, Mafia, Castro, LBJ, Teamsters, Freemasons --President Shot 129 Times from 43 Different Angles") to 1993 ("New President to feel Nation's Pain, Breasts").

Either this sort of thing works for you, or not. I did some serious snickering.



NEBULA AWARD WINNERS

Best Short Story-

Bruce Holland Rogers: *Thirteen Ways to Water* (Black Cats and Broken Mirrors, Martin Greenberg and John Helfers, Ed., DAW, Jun 98)

Best Novellete-

Jane Yolen: *Lost Girls* (Realms of Fantasy, Feb 98)

Best Novella-

Sheila Finch: *Reading the Bones* (F&SF, Jan 98)

Best Novel-

Joe Haldeman: *Forever Peace* (Ace, Oct 97)

Bradbury Award-

J. Michael Straczynski for *Babylon 5*

Author Emeritus-

Philip Klass aka William Tenn

Grandmaster-

Hal Clement

MORE REVIEWS

By Royce Day

Blind Man's Bluff, The Untold Story of American Submarine Espionage by Sherry Sontag and Christopher Drew.

This book should be required reading for Tom Clancy and the horde of imitators behind him. It covers the very beginnings of post WWII sub spying projects, dependant on cranky diesel subs equipped with early radio eavesdropping devices, to more modern (but still cranky) nuclear boats with independent 'fish' searching the ocean floor for spent Soviet missile test equipment. Not to mention daring and politically disastrous cable taps on the USSR Navy's underwater telephone lines.

Most of the information here was new to me, and utterly fascinating. Such as the Navy's efforts to obfuscate the reasons behind the loss of the *Scorpion* from malfunctioning torpedo, or their anger at the CIA's boondoggle with the *Glomar Explorer*. It's based on interviews with former submariners, most of which remain anonymous to the reader, but the tales told within ring of truth.

This one's a page turner.

The Golden Globe by John Varley.

This one *isn't* a page turner.

Some books, you can't put down. And then some, you put down pretty easily. And maybe you'll get back them soon. TGG was like that for me. The main character, Kenneth "Sparky" Valentine, is a former child TV star who's spent the last seventy years as an itinerant actor kicking around the Solar system from Varley's previous books The Ophichu Hotline and Steel Beach. He's a clever fellow, with a body that can literally be molded for any role, and a steamer trunk that would give The Luggage a run for its money. And he's on the run from a near unstoppable hit man from a *truly* disgusting society of criminals.

Unfortunately, this book can't really decide what it wants to be. Part of it's a mystery (what's Sparky been running from for the past 70 years?), part of it is a domestic drama (Sparky had a pretty typical childhood for a child actor, which is to say 'bad'.), part of it is a thriller (the aforementioned hit man), part of it is backstage comedy, and part of it is sheer travelog, as Sparky travels from Pluto to Ganymede to an enormous space station, and finally to Luna. None of which is particularly engaging.

It's not a bad book. Sparky is a fun guy to listen to when he spins a tale, and the fourth wall gets smashed on a regular basis, but it just never grabbed me on any particular level. I'm still trying to figure out why...

BOOK REVIEW (as seen on Amazon.com)

Phylogenesis (Foster, Alan Dean, *Founding of the Commonwealth*, Bk. 1)
Hardcover - 336 pages 1 Ed edition (June 1999)
Ballantine Books (Trd); ISBN: 034541862X

Book Description:

With such classic novels as *Orphan Star* and *The Tar-Aiym-Krang*, New York Times bestselling author Alan Dean Foster has captivated readers with his brilliantly imagined *Humanx Commonwealth*, the interstellar empire where intelligent aliens and humans live side by side. Now Foster takes us back to the unplanned beginnings of this extraordinary alliance . . .

In the years after first contact, humans and the insect-like *Thranx* agreed to a tentative sharing of ideas and cultures despite the ingrained repulsion they had yet to overcome. Mindful that one day they might need each other as allies, the leaders of the two species conceded that the only way to reach an accommodation was through a slow, lengthy process of limited contact. When the time was right, the leaders of both worlds would reveal to their respective peoples that a union with an alien race was indeed possible.

However, they never planned for a chance meeting between a misfit artist and a petty thief. Desvendapur was a talented *Thranx* poet who was bored with his life and needed new inspiration for his work. Hearing a rumor that a secret alien contact project existed on his homeworld, he recklessly forged a new identity and headed off to find his muse.

In a place unlike the familiar Hives of Willow-Wane, Desvendapur ran into Cheelo Montoya, a small-time criminal with big dreams of making a fast buck. But chance and circumstance tossed the con man and the mad poet together in what was to become a journey that would forever change their beliefs, their futures, and their worlds.

TV REVIEW (review from scifi.com's weekly newsletter)

Crusade

"War Zone"

Starring David Allen Brooks, Gary Cole, Daniel Dae Kim, Carrie Dobro, Peter Woodward

Created by J. Michael Straczynski

TNT Premieres June 9, 10 p.m. ET

Reviewed by Patrick Lee

When last viewers visited the Babylon 5 universe, Earth forces had succeeded in routing the army of Drakh, the former minions of the Shadows--but not before the nefarious creatures unleashed a lethal plague on Earth.

Crusade picks up where Babylon 5 left off—with a new crew on a new ship whose mission is to find a cure for the "biogenetically engineered virus" before it wipes out all life on Earth. It is guessed they have about five years.

In the opening episode, "War Zone," Earth is under quarantine, orbited by the wreckage of starships destroyed in the battle against the Drakh. Riots have broken out among the panicked population, and the Earth government is in disarray.

Intrepid Capt. Matthew Gideon (Cole), former skipper of a science exploration vessel, has been ordered to Mars, where Senator McQuade appoints him commander of the Ranger ship Excalibur. Seems the senator believes Gideon is the man to find a cure out there in outer space somewhere: "You're a dangerous man when you want to be, captain, and right now we need a dangerous man," he says.

Gideon's new crew includes feisty physician Dr. Sarah Chambers (Marjean Holden); thief and Drakh expert Dureena Nafeel (Dobro); and telepathic first officer Lt. John Matheson (Kim). Then there's the techno-mage Galen (Woodward), who acts as Gideon's guardian angel for reasons that aren't clear.

Meanwhile, an Earth ship has forced one of the fleeing Drakh ships down on CETI 4, where gifted xeno-archeologist Max Eilerson (Brooks) is uncovering the ruins of a 10,000-year-old lost alien city. The Excalibur is dispatched to rescue them before the Drakh can wipe out Eilerson and his team. Unbeknownst to Gideon, however, a fleet of Drakh are closing in on CETI 4. Before the end of the episode, Eilerson will sign on with Gideon's crew.

"And so it begins"

Originally intended as the second, five-year "novel for television" in the Babylon 5 universe, Crusade was cancelled after creative disagreements between network TNT and the show's producers. TNT will air the 13 episodes already produced. Talks with alternative venues, such as the SCI FI Channel, have so far failed to find a new home for the series.

That said, it's difficult to get a bead on Crusade based on the viewing of its introductory episode. The episode is largely taken up with housekeeping matters like setting up the back story, meeting characters and establishing the premise.

At first glimpse, though, Crusade seems to share Babylon 5's affection for rebels and misfits, and its universe is populated with lots of them. That promises to make for some interesting character interactions later on. TV veteran Cole is especially appealing as the no-nonsense Gideon.

Unfortunately, Crusade also shares Babylon 5's tin ear for human speech, substituting in its place a lot of earnest declamations or smart-alecky dialog. "I got plans for the weekend, and being dead ain't part of them," one character says.

But it's difficult to fault Straczynski and company for the premise or the richly complex universe they've envisioned. So rich, in fact, that it helps to have some familiarity with Babylon 5 and its various political and social conflicts as a context for the dramas sure to play out in Crusade's brief run.

The computer special effects appear superior to Babylon 5's, and the same can be said of the sets and costumes. (Oddly, and for reasons too complicated to go into here, subsequent episodes will feature older sets and costumes, as the series was shot out of order. It will be interesting to see how the creators deal with this.)

I'm told some familiar faces from Babylon 5 are supposed to make appearances in Crusade. But I'm not sure if the show will be around long enough to get to know the new bunch as well.

--

P.L.

MOVIE REVIEW (also from scifi.com—what can I say?)

WARNING—Spoilers included in first four paragraphs

Star Wars: Episode 1 - The Phantom Menace

Rated PG

Starring Liam Neeson, Ewan McGregor, Natalie Portman, Jake Lloyd

Written and Directed by George Lucas

124 Minutes

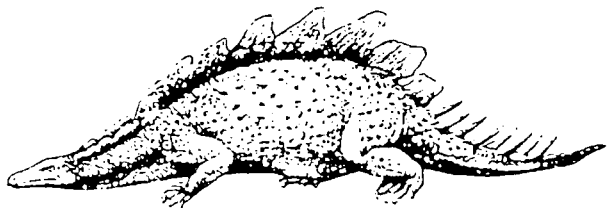
Reviewed by Jeff Berkwits

In an effort to compel Queen Amidala (Portman), the benevolent ruler of the small planet Naboo, to meet their outrageous demands, the Trade Federation has set up a blockade around her world. Jedi warrior Qui-Gon Jinn (Neeson) and his apprentice Obi-Wan Kenobi (McGregor) hope to find a peaceful solution to the simmering conflict, but when they board a Federation battleship, their less-than-friendly reception convinces them that negotiation is not a viable option.

After a dramatic escape from the vessel, the duo discovers that a full-scale invasion of Naboo is imminent. They quickly travel to the royal palace via a secret route disclosed by newfound friend Jar Jar Binks (voiced by Ahmed Best), and whisk Amidala off the planet to the out-of-the-way world of Tatooine. There the group meets the young slave Anakin Skywalker (Lloyd), who Jinn senses has the potential to become a powerful Jedi Knight. The child lends credence to those beliefs when he wins a dangerous Podrace, a victory which not only allows the political refugees to leave Tatooine but also gains the boy his freedom.

Arriving on the planet Coruscant, Amidala intends to plead her case before the Galactic Senate while Jinn hopes to receive permission to begin Skywalker's training. However, Senator Palpatine (Ian McDiarmid) has other plans, and the band soon find themselves back on Naboo, facing the evil Darth Maul (Ray Park) and fighting for the survival of nearly every creature on the planet.

A glorious adventure



Though excessive media hype has likely built up audience expectations for this movie far beyond what anyone could reasonably expect, most SF fans should find *The Phantom Menace* to be a monumental motion picture.

George Lucas has created a truly glorious adventure, combining a familiar scenario with wondrous new worlds, vivid villains and an awe-inspiring story.

With the exception of a few relatively minor computer-generated entities, the much-ballyhooed special effects are consistently amazing, providing realistic representations of everything from huge droid invasion forces to flashy starfighters. Most of the flesh-and-blood actors are outstanding too, with McGregor marvelously matching the vocal cadence of the aged Obi-Wan and Portman echoing the fiery feistiness of her as-yet-unborn daughter Leia. Meanwhile, Neeson exhibits the quiet dignity and poise one would expect from a genuine Jedi master, while Lloyd is appropriately hopeful and innocent.

Yet the film isn't completely flawless. Some early sections are rather slow-moving, since Lucas spends considerable time detailing various political machinations and introducing new characters. And although computer-generated comedic foil Jar Jar Binks should appeal to children, most adults will likely find his prattle and personality extremely annoying.

Notwithstanding such shortcomings, Lucas has produced a movie that suitably embellishes his already highly imaginative *Star Wars* universe. *The Phantom Menace* may not be 100 percent perfect, but it's safe to say that most SF fans will find the flick favorable, fantastical and, most important of all, fun.

Folks expecting to see extended sequences with well-known characters like Yoda or C-3PO might be disappointed, although Lucas promises that they'll play much more prominent roles in future films. But those same fans will undoubtedly relish a brief appearance by the always ornery Tusken Raiders. -- Jeff

MOVIE REVIEW (yes, another from scifi.com)

The Thirteenth Floor

Rated R

Starring Craig Bierko, Gretchen Mol, Armin Mueller-Stahl, Vincent D'Onofrio

Directed by Josef Rusnak

100 Minutes

Reviewed by Patrick Lee

Viewers first meet Hannon Fuller (Mueller-Stahl) when he asks Ashton (D'Onofrio), the bartender at the art deco Wilshire Grand hotel, to deliver a letter to his friend and protege, Douglas Hall (Bierko). Fuller then goes home to his wife in 1937 Los Angeles, whereupon his consciousness is zapped back to the

reality of 1999.

Fuller is actually the head of a mysterious corporation that has created the mother of all computer simulations: a virtual 1930s L.A. with fully formed "units"--representations of people--who conduct their lives unaware that they exist only as electronic pulses.

Fuller's innovation is that a person can "jack in," or download his or her consciousness into one of the units, in effect entering the simulated world and experiencing it in all its sensual reality. Fuller is on the verge of revealing a deep secret about this reality when he is brutally murdered. Hall awakens to find bloody clothing in his apartment, and to find himself the chief suspect of a dogged LAPD homicide detective (Dennis Haysbert).

Both, meanwhile, are surprised when a woman appears claiming to be Fuller's long-lost daughter, Jane (Mol). Hall decides the answers to this riddle must lie in the simulation. With the help of techno-nerd Whitney (D'Onofrio again), he risks his own sanity by entering the simulation.

Once inside, he finds himself inhabiting the body of a man named Ferguson. He sets off across 1930s Los Angeles, encountering Fuller's doppelganger, a Pasadena antique dealer named Grierson, and Whitney's double, the bartender Ashton.

He finds out that Fuller had been "jacking in" frequently to this artificial world and had made an unsettling discovery. When Hall/Ferguson asks Ashton about the letter, Ashton grows violent, and the two fight--until Hall is suddenly pulled out of the simulation.

Back in present-day Los Angeles, Hall finds himself strangely attracted to Jane, as if he's met her before. "Deja vu is usually a sign of love at first sight," she tells him. Meanwhile, the evidence is piling up that Hall may have murdered his mentor, Fuller. Why can't Hall remember? And why is there no record of Jane's existence anywhere? Hall must return to the past in order to find the answers he fears.

"None of this is real."

Adapted from the SF novel *Simulacron-3* by Daniel F. Galouye, *The Thirteenth Floor* is a serious and handsome rumination on the nature of reality and identity in the tradition of SF films like *Dark City*, *The Matrix* and *Blade Runner*. (Hall's apartment is identical in many respects to Deckard's in the latter film.)

Intriguingly, however, the film plumbs the past rather than the future, and makes clever use of dual characters (skillfully played by D'Onofrio, Mueller-Stahl and the others) to erect a hall of mirrors from which there seems to be no escape.

The Thirteenth Floor was co-written by Ravel Centano-Rodriguez and German director Rusnak, who shot second unit on *Godzilla*. It was co-produced by

Roland Emmerich of *Godzilla* and *Independence Day* fame and financed in part by the German government. The German influence is most evident in the chilly, Modernist present-day sequences, which are all sharp edges, blue shadows and backlit characters.

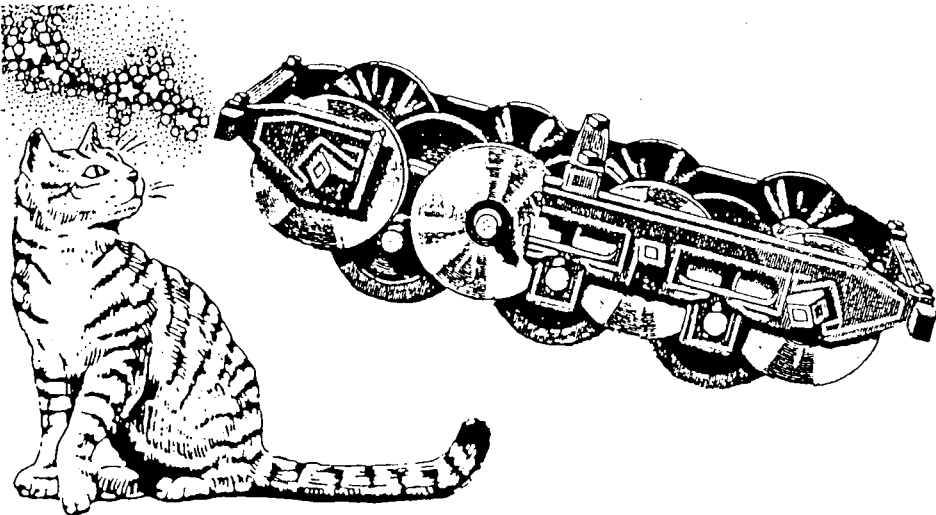
Ironically, it's the virtual world of Depression-era Los Angeles that feels most real in this film. The 1930s era virtually pops off the screen, all desaturated sepia tones, rich curves, warm fabrics and sweaty bodies. The film's production designers clearly spent most of their energy in recreating this lost city, judiciously mixing real locations with computer graphics. The result is breathtaking, especially for viewers who have spent time in LA. The effectiveness with which the filmmakers evoke this period and place deepens the irony of Hall's quest for the truth behind reality.

Beyond the look of the film, the plot contains enough curves and feints to keep most viewers guessing, although it's pretty easy to figure out what Fuller's deep secret probably is. Even so, the twists keep the film engaging, though its pace is slow for an SF actioner, right up to the too-happy ending.

Mol has too little screen time, and her function (through a subplot that defies logic) seems mainly to add a note of romance to Hall's predicament. Bierko, though credible, seems a little bland to hold the center of this movie. But D'Onofrio (*Men in Black*) energizes the film whenever he's onscreen, alternating menace and befuddlement.

I liked *The Thirteenth Floor* more than I thought I would, mainly because it managed to distinguish itself well enough from similarly themed films that have preceded it, and because of its swell recreation of the roaring '30s.

-- P.L.



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/>



Richard & Nicki Lynch Trade
PO Box 3120
Gaithersburg, MD 20885